

IS THERE VALUE IN CHANGE ASSURANCE?

Most change consulting firms have an assurance offering and a glossy brochure extolling the benefits of independent change assurance.

The brochures explain how Executives want confidence that their costly change programmes or portfolios will deliver the planned benefits on time and to budget.

They explain the benefits of assurance, how their service is different i.e. better and how they work with you in a flexible way to deliver maximum value.

You may ask, what's wrong with that? Well, nothing. The problem is, Execs just aren't buying it anymore!

Very few see the value in a proactive assurance service, and fewer still are prepared to spend their 'hard to come by' change budget on something that doesn't immediately appear tangible.

IS THE PROBLEM IN THE MESSAGING?

Delivering change has never been more important or difficult.

It's characterised by increased urgency, rapid adoption of digital technologies, agile methods and legacy and data systems that are no longer fit for purpose.

When you combine that with the usual headlines about failed change programmes and the ubiquitous change issues faced by most large organisations, then surely change assurance should be highly valued and in great demand!

It's a conundrum then; why don't Execs see the value?

- Are we failing to explain the real-life benefits and the value it will bring?
- Do they believe their Programme Directors should be doing it?
- Are they concerned they are paying to hear what they already know?
- Do they think assurance is only useful when things have gone wrong?
- Is there a suspicion that some firms use assurance to land and expand?

Our job as change professionals is to win the hearts and minds of Execs. We need to better articulate the benefits of spending a small amount of 'good' money up-front, rather than a lot of 'bad' money after the fact i.e. when change programmes and portfolios have spiralled out of control and into recovery.

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IS CHANGE ASSURANCE A GOOD THING?

Prior to my consulting days, I led large-scale change and transformations. There were periods when I thought I had all the answers and knew exactly what was going on - that turned out to be a costly mistake.

I once heard change assurance described as 'providing the benefit of hindsight, before something really bad happens'; and that stayed with me.

That's why I now advise CXOs and Change Directors to employ an effective change assurance service; and given the ongoing COVID-19 challenges, that advice has never been stronger.

The simple reason being; it is essential to have an independent view that their change or portfolio is:

- Joined-up and driving towards the agreed business outcomes
- On-time and within budget
- Engaging stakeholders at the right level
- Resourced appropriately with seamless internal and third-party teams
- On top of the key risks and issues
- Delivering a product that can and will be used by the business.

That may sound like motherhood and apple pie, but these are just some of the areas, which if not managed correctly, cause change programmes and portfolios to fail. And that's when lots of 'bad' money is spent on recovery, company boards get very angry and ultimately, people get fired!

LEADING THE CHARGE FOR CHANGE ASSURANCE

Whilst you need to understand an Agile delivery methodology don't get distracted. Keep it simple and focus on the outcome. Start with the user needs, do the hard work to make the digital product simple to use and focus on the iterative delivery to the 'Minimum Viable Product' - and when you have done that, iterate further until you meet the point of 'done' (where the business is happy and full benefits are realised). Remember, throughout this, keep showing your product to your users and your sponsors, listen to their feedback and improve based on real insights, not assumptions.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

I am passionate about the value of good change assurance; and it is especially important as we all face into the unprecedented COVID-19 challenges.

Whether you're a change professional or a buyer of change and consulting services, I would love to hear your thoughts.

And of course, if you are accountable for a change programme or portfolio that you feel would benefit from a change assurance review, please get in touch.

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