



changedrivers

systems make it possible – people make it happen

Half of Change Projects Don't Deliver

The first of a series of articles on Project Managing change by [Malcolm Anderson](#), a Founding Director of *changedrivers* and Practice Leader, Change Project Dynamics.

In our survey of the effectiveness of change management in Australian organisations, almost half of senior executives admitted that their change initiatives did not achieve their objectives. Middle managers took an even stronger view with nearly 60% reporting that change initiatives were ineffective in reaching goals.

Given the level of resource, time, effort and human stress invested in change projects, this statistic must give conscientious managers major cause for concern. Add to this the continuous harping of management gurus on the theme that change is here to stay, and the increasing impact of the global market on Australian organisations, it indicates a serious problem in need of a solution. So what is the nature of the issue?

In our survey, 55% of non-managers reported that in their opinion the organisation was not good at turning plans into action. Yet these are the very people whose behaviours change plans are supposed to target. Taking it a step further, 56% of senior executives believe they do turn complex problems into structured plans, but 56% of middle managers believe this does not happen! Ignoring the degree of confusion revealed here, this means that half of managers don't effectively convert complex problems into deliverable plans.

Root Causes not Band-Aids

To complete this disturbing picture, only 27% of middle managers were able to agree that root causes were analysed before solutions were put in place. So ¾ of our time is spent creating band-aid fixes that will have to be reworked when the same issues arise once more, a little way down the track.

And why is this so? Well, we at *changedrivers* would argue that in order to define root causes and identify the right solution, managers need a group problem solving process that is understood throughout the organisation. But of that same middle management group who are typically given the task of working out how a problem will be solved in the workplace, only 35% said they had an understood group problem solving process.



Figure 1: Changedriving: The Basic Process

As Figure 1 reveals, the basic process of making change happen (or 'changedriving' as we prefer to call it), is very simple. But as our research above shows, it's much easier said than done. So what are the critical success factors (CSFs) for sustainable change? And how can *changedrivers* help you avoid the huge cost of resources, time and effort in failed change?

CSF #1: Understanding the Demands of Successful Change

The only reason to attempt change is because you wish to make a sustainable difference to how your organisation performs. You must therefore have evidence that performance is inappropriate, and that the chosen change will have the required impact.

Make no mistake change will be ineffective if you do not carry the key stakeholders with you. As a minimum, customers, managers and staff must be fully committed to making the change happen or it will not stick. To build and maintain 'buy-in' you must identify the WIIFM (what's in it for me?) of the key stakeholder groups. If you do not, they will not change their behaviours, and why should they?

In order to achieve sustained change the behaviour of your managers and staff must be permanently altered. It is not good enough to change systems or processes alone, although this must be done to provide a controlled basis for the change, and to reinforce the behavioural change. Changing peoples' behaviours is not something that can be decreed from above. It requires subtle planning, a comprehensive approach, and the stamina and commitment to see it through to its conclusion.

CSF#2: Defining the Right Change to Make

*'For every complex problem there is a simple, easy to implement, straight-forward to communicate, quick, cheap, and **wrong** answer' (Alan Ward)*

Many people can identify with the above quote from painful personal experience. The answer is to use a structured process to ensure the right information is identified, the right people are involved, the right questions are asked, and the root cause is identified. This enables the right change to be outlined and the required change strategies and accountabilities defined. It is important to be aware that this approach applies if the core of the desired change is 'hard' (e.g. systems) or 'soft' (e.g. culture).

At *changedrivers* we have developed the *VIA - Vision ⇒ Into ⇒ Action* - process as our proven 'way' of making a direct link between a complex business problem and an implementable accountability plan. We use the *VIA* process to work with the senior management team to determine the desired future for the organisation. We then help the middle managers of the organisation to translate these goals into deliverable business plans. Our reasoning is simple. If you want to deliver real change, you must involve the accountable managers, their teams and the key stakeholders in the implementation process.

In the same way *VIA* can be applied to business or organisational issues at any level and within or across functions. So, what are the key factors that make such a structured process successful in devising the right change?

It must be structured, fundamentally simple and eminently repeatable

It has to involve all the key stakeholders to the issue(s) or it won't work

It must be capable of enabling the key stakeholders to achieve agreement on:

- What the end result would ideally look like?
- What the current situation is?

- What kind of future is realistically deliverable in the necessary timeframe?
- What the basic requirements of that future are?
- What barriers exist the inhibit achieving the desired future?
- What needs to be done – by whom – by when - to overcome those barriers?

There has to be top level commitment to time being spent to fix the issue once and for all and therefore to the follow through necessary to make change happen.

The whole process needs to be underpinned by prior research to ensure that the decisions taken are soundly based on data to support all the opinions!

CSF#3: Planning for Sustainability

Do we want our hard planned change to stay once we've made it? Of Course we do! But make no mistake, this is where change managers face 'the hard yards' because experience clearly shows that sustaining change requires special effort. This is where most managers need special help, because this is where most change programs fall flat. Sustainability requires two key pre-requisites which are hard for many managers to deliver:

- **The ongoing active commitment of all managers, especially senior managers**
- **An understanding that sustainability requires an integrated and comprehensive approach**

The 9 Essentials of Sustaining Change (The 9 E's)

That's why we at *changedrivers* created our model for sustaining change, the 9 E's, developed from the cumulative change consulting experience of our Principals during the last 20 years, coupled with the best in current management thinking.



The

Value of the 9E's

The model identifies nine organisational dimensions that require attention if change is to be sustained. Note that you do *not* have to make changes in all these areas, but you do need to take all into consideration if you mean to sustain the change you are planning. Also, be clear that the 9E's does not describe the process of change, it focuses your thinking on issues that will aid sustainability downstream, but must be considered up-front to be effective.

CSF#4 Managing the Project: Making Change Happen

Finally, change projects need careful, active and sustained management. Critically, change projects, like any other project, cannot be delivered without dedicated resources. While this topic, like many in this article, could be the subject of articles in themselves, suffice to say at this stage that if the project is not properly understood at the outset, the odds are that it will fail. At changedrivers we use the 7D model at the end of a rigorous VIA scoping workshop to articulate the required change in a series of Project Outlines. The 7Ds broadly works like this:

Developing Project Outlines: changedrivers' 7D Process

- **Definition**
- **Deliverables and Deadlines**
- **Dependencies and Demurrage**
- **Development**
- **Devolution**

Definition

- A concise statement of required outcomes that are to be achieved by the project team.
- Must be written in terms of outcome, not method of achievement
- Who will own the project?
- Who will hold accountability for the elements?

Deliverables and Deadlines

- A precise statement of the outputs that are expected from the project team
- Clarity about when stakeholders are expecting delivery

Dependencies & Demurrage

- What could go wrong that will stop your project delivering the promised improvements?
- What can you do to effectively reduce the risk to your project?

Development

What are the 4S issues that will need to be addressed to deliver this project?

- Systems & Processes
- Structure & Resources
- Skills & Knowledge
- Stakeholders & Motivation

Devolution

- When the project's job is done, who is going to own the ongoing process?

- What are the transition issues that the project needs to address?
- To what degree do the eventual owners need to be involved in the development process?
- How will you generate ownership for the solution?
- When do they need to be included in the work?

At the end of it all, it is rigorous, holistic and sensitive management of the project strands that is required to deliver coordinated change that leads to the embedding of the systems, the leveraging of people's behaviour and the sustainment and enhancement of productivity.