Three top tips for delivering sustainable transformational change

In 2016, we ran a brief survey to understand people's experience of significant organisational change. The survey remains open and the following are only flash results from the respondents so far, however the findings are already startling and have profound implications for change practice. All the respondents so far have indicated they have either a practical understanding or a deep understanding of delivering change, so we have confidence in the findings, despite coming from a relatively small sample.

You can still take the survey here https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/DLXF9KN

Findings

Most significant change programmes continue to focus on business processes (75% of respondents), restructuring (67% of respondents), strategy (58% of respondents) or business performance management (50% of respondents). As such they are mostly paying attention to the rational, logical side of change. However, all respondents reported some positive impact was expected across other areas: leadership and colleague capability, engaging colleagues in the strategy and developing team culture, or in other words, the more emotionally capable, developmental side of change.

## Tip 1: Believe that sustainable change is possible

Encouragingly, 63% of change is either mostly successful (58%) or completely successful (5%), which confounds the oft-quoted but never seemingly substantiated, "70% of change efforts fail". It is perhaps time to let go of that self-defeating cliché and expect to succeed at delivering significant organisational change, especially where tips two and three are heeded.

Tip 2: You can't sustain change without focusing on the whole system

The following chart shows the actual impact on several areas that were targeted to change *significantly*.
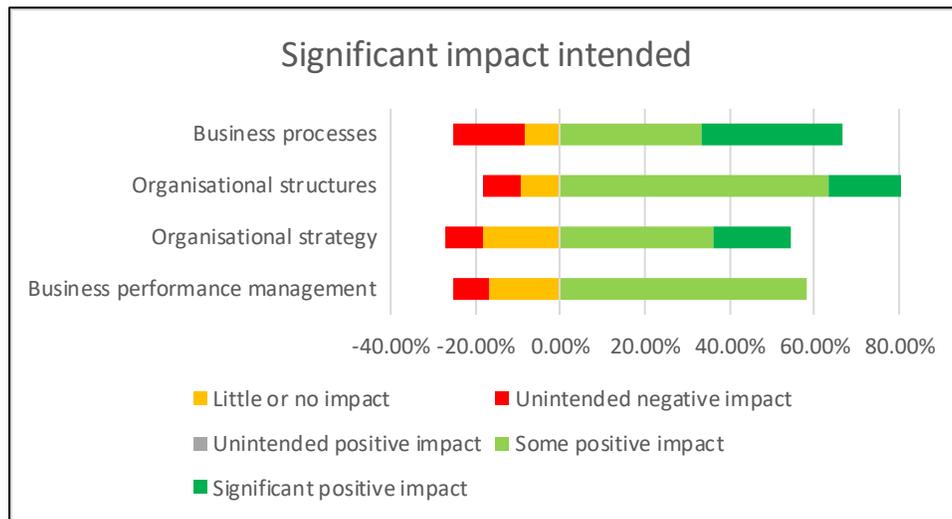
This demonstrates, whilst there were some unintended negative impacts, by-and-large the intended change was mostly positive. Conversely, the following chart shows the actual impact on the areas that were intended to change positively, but only to *some* extent.
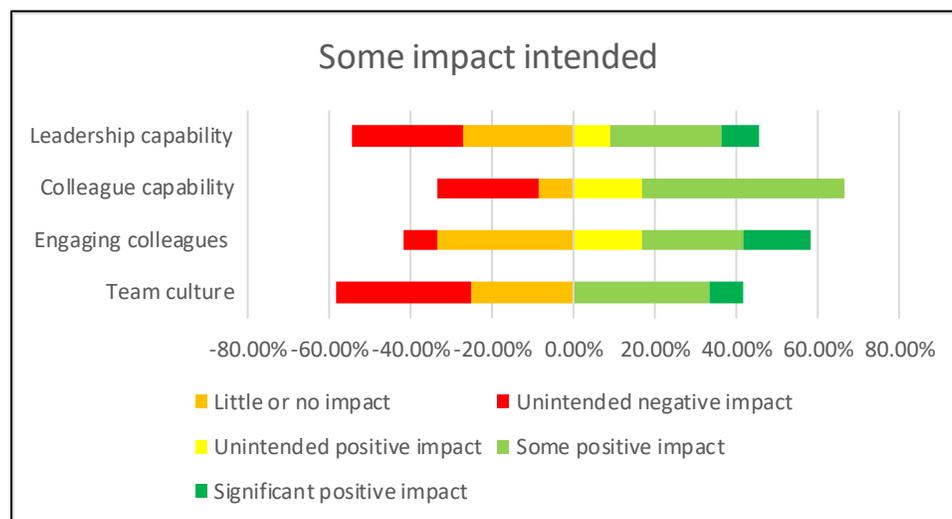
This demonstrates negative impacts were felt in areas not specifically targeted for significant change, particularly leadership capability and team culture. The lesson is clear: focus on business processes, structures and strategy at the expense of the whole system and you will negatively impact on leadership and culture.

You must pay attention to the whole system and not narrow your change focus on one or two components. You can't affect one subsystem without impacting on others. Make sure that impact is positive right across the organisation.

Tip 3: Pay attention to the principles of sustainable change

The findings reveal 58% of change efforts follow no recognised project/programme management approach. Those that do (e.g. PRINCE2, MSP, APMG) have more chance of succeeding, but this pales compared to whether the following critical success factors are present (ranked in order of importance):

Critical success factors	% more likely to succeed
Clear roles and responsibilities for delivering change	100%
Sufficient capability and capacity to deliver the change	100%
Assessment of the organisational readiness for change	100%
Clear change vision	88%
Colleague engagement in the change vision	83%
Quick wins	83%
Realistic and realisable benefits plan	83%
Leaders sufficiently involved in leading the change	71%
Sufficient opportunities to learn and adapt to new ways of working	67%
...	...
Recognised project management approach	57%

It is interesting to note the presence of the most important factors is uncorrelated with there being a recognised project management approach in place!

Conclusion

You will increase your chances of delivering sustainable organisational change if you pay heed to the three tips:

1. Believe that sustainable change is possible
2. Pay attention to the whole system – at CMdeltaConsulting, this starts with effective diagnosis of the whole system and not simply assuming a restructure or a change to business processes is the solution
3. Change is expensive. Define clear roles and responsibilities for leading change, invest in the capability and capacity you need and undertake an assessment of the organisational readiness for change. These will substantially improve your chances of succeeding.

It strikes us these tips are eminently achievable.

Phone Jeremy on 07766 420550 to find out more about how to embed sustainable transformational change. We run a half day workshop on the subject, which considers whole system leadership, effective diagnosis and the *ChangeForce* framework for leading sustainable change.