

Change Mastery

The Persuasion Paradigm

Success as a change agent of any description is based on your ability to influence others. Using authority and rank is a poor tool for persuading others and based purely on sanction. Here, Phil Atkinson highlights the need for professionals such as accountants, IT professionals, project managers, consultants, quality and manufacturing engineers, auditors, governance and risk consultants to commit to practice to complement their technical skills with behavioural and political mastery which includes using motivation, persuasion, influence and negotiation to win their case.

Change skills start with working with people, understanding their motivations and engaging and influencing them to look at things differently. I think we can all see the importance of this in the context of moving big macro corporate change programmes forward, as well as on the micro level with personal development.

Most of us enable change to take place, not through the use of authority and being assertive, but relying on the 'meta' skills of influence and persuasion. If we have to rely on our job titles or being of senior rank then that is a shame. As is too likely the case, often only a small percentage of any workforce have received training in this 'soft skills' arena, and yet it's an area where rapid learning is experienced which does have a major impact on personal effectiveness.

I find it amazing that we get the balance between technical and soft skills training all wrong. Staff are trained to develop their technical skills in their core competence but the execution of their role and

their effectiveness is achieved not by just demonstrating this facility, but the behaviours and skills that support them. Let me provide some examples.

Telecoms and technical wizards

We have all met the technical geek who is great at doing their job in isolation, but when required to interact with team members, customers and others, their degree of interpersonal competence erodes their confidence. Have you ever met engineers, accountants, lawyers, professional service advisors, IT specialists, actuaries, risk managers and others who would benefit from such training?

You know the impact that this can have on performance is enormous – especially if the account manager starts losing customers, the insurance agent loses the contract, the engineer alienates the single source preferred supplier or the technician notices that his



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clients are migrating to other suppliers and providers.

It's not about manipulation, but getting a win-win for all parties.

If the average employer committed to developing superior development in behavioural mastery they could hugely impact their results for the better. The average advisory organisation has below par sales staff interacting with the customer. Developing techniques to move a client towards a win-win is ecological for both parties. Using guile or pushiness is for short term gain only, with buyer remorse the winner, you with depleted clients and a lousy reputation. As soon as you start to push the other person into a position you are moving towards win-lose – with you the loser.

It's not soft skills – it's hard skills

Although people refer to such development as 'soft skills' – the term is really a non starter because many people find these skills are difficult to establish and most fail to understand what they need to do to rehearse these skills until they have acquired mastery. Only recently an accountant friend told me about a presentation he had to give to the management team in a large Insurance business. He was clearly uncomfortable about it and realised he needed to practise, so he

developed his very own 'death by PowerPoint' that would do him no favours.

He asked me what I thought. My view is that PowerPoint is only a tool to direct the attention of the audience to the presenter. PowerPoint should be composed of prompts or illustrations designed to focus the attention of the audiences to the next dynamic point delivered by the presenter. Effective PowerPoint reinforces the power of the presenter – it should never distract or bore the audience. As you can guess, the accountant devoted all his time to the slide show and none to rehearsal. The first time he stood up to present was his very first live rehearsal and it was obvious!

Mastery in any skill is based on the simple use of repetition and rehearsal, and it's no different with talking formally (or otherwise) to people. You'd never improve your golf swing by watching PowerPoint, so how are you going to give people confidence in your business skills if you never get up there and rehearse?

Confidence is an emotional state not a journey

Confidence and self esteem are not journeys which you embark upon and then arrive at some time in the future. They are emotional states that can be accessed anytime by anyone – you just have to know how and

it can be learned easily. Early on in our workshops we deal with the issue of confidence and self esteem. You see, it is all geared around identifying issues and the presence of self limiting beliefs. I am told we are born into this life with two fears – the fear of falling and the fear of loud noises – yet we go through life picking fears up all the time.

Be vigilant: question your self limits constantly

Most of our beliefs have been created by others and what they say to us at an early age. We know, for instance, that most empowering and limiting beliefs are firmly in place by the time we are 6, 7 or 8. Please pay attention to the following. In terms of our brain evolution we do not have the cognitive ability to judge whether these beliefs are right, just and accurate about us at this age. Only at a later age would we have this ability. We have not developed the critical faculty at 6, 7 or 8. We develop our critical cognitive functions at 8, 9, 10 and 11. So tell me, how can we judge whether a negative belief about 'self' is accurate if we don't possess the critical processing power to evaluate whether it is fair or not?

In honesty, we are pretty much programmed by paternal authority figures around us and this includes parents, grandparents, teachers, ministers and other care givers. At that age you

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don't have the ability to judge whether a statement about your behaviour is accurate, fair or justified.

In our workshop sessions we say belief is a matter of choice – that is once you can be consciously aware of it and question its validity. Someone may say something to you “You are not good enough” or “You are like me, I was never good at school”. These are statements directed to you, fairly or unfairly, which you cannot challenge because this critical rational ability was probably not in place. Our commitment is we think it's a good idea to challenge these negative beliefs at the beginning of the workshop sessions rather than tackling them on at the end. It is central to development and self esteem.

Confidence is a big issue in business performance: case examples

We designed workshops on interpersonal influence and presentation skills for groups of internal auditors within a UK telecom giant. The reasoning behind this was a realisation that, although the auditors were highly skilled in their technical areas of budgetary control, risk assessment, process improvement, finance and computer audit, they did not have the capacity to create a great enough change in their clients within the business.

Sabotaging improvement

Instances of line managers deliberately confusing and deflecting the enquiries of their internal audit function led to a very poor acceptance rate of findings and reports, and even poorer installation of the required controls. We designed and installed an interpersonal skills programme to address these issues and

within three years all 240 staff and others had attended and used the strategies and methodologies daily in their audit work.

The results achieved were significant and the confidence and assertive nature of the internal audit division was significantly enhanced. This was later extended to other parts of the Telecom's business including inventory control and, later, purchasing.

We have designed and run similar programmes in America, Canada and Europe for engineering companies. We worked with many hundreds of manufacturing engineers over a seven

year period to improve their change management skills to ensure they had complementary skills to deal with challenging operations and plant managers all over the world. Working with financial services companies it is relatively easy to take their accounts, IT, audit and risk and governance, internal consultants and project managers up the same learning curve and complement their skill base.

Content and process of soft skills

Interaction, practice and rehearsal are fundamental to any process for interpersonal

improvement. We combine this with especially designed role plays and exercise which are focused entirely on real business in the organisation. No synthetic role plays or hypothetical scenarios. Every activity must reflect the challenges and issues that they face everyday and which will challenge their role in the future. Those designing the materials and process must be a blend of operational managers from the business and a listening behavioural consultant with the credibility to deliver. This is to be treated as a premier league process. After all, this is about leading change!





With practice one can swiftly identify the objections that others have to your proposals in advance of them raising them

Leadership & Interpersonal Influence

Without leadership there is no change. The best in persuasive techniques, negotiation, influence strategies and psychometrics are central to this process. It is a cycle of learn, rehearse, practice, reflect. It will come as no surprise that those who drive change probably project much more of a 'transformational' style than their less visible 'transactional' types who prefer to focus on short-term managerial and administrative style. We believe that those who are transformational in nature probably are quite independent and will challenge the status quo and look for new ways of working.

Personal traits are definitely instrumental in shaping change projects. A slow moving mechanical style that focuses on analysing and measuring everything never achieves a great deal and even if they do, they do so in spite of failing to provide a lead to their team.

We utilise personality profiles to examine the variety of styles that can be successful in bringing about change. Our particular model is based on the active transformational style of manager who spends a great deal of her or his time challenging the way things are done. There is always a better way or a cheaper way or simply another way to reduce cycle times and unnecessary inspection and micro management. Transformers have something about their personality that inspires and enthuse people to greater achievements.

Take a look in the mirror

In our development workshops we focus on 'mirror gazing', that is asking oneself "what is it like to receive my behaviour on a good day and

also on a bad day?" Reflect on this. Just by focusing on how we interact with others we can get a grasp of the conscious and unconscious triggers and behaviours we send out. We also can then identify whether we are moving further towards developing a real team around us, or just winning acceptance and conformity because of our authority.

Boss watching

Remember, everyone is a boss watcher. If you are in a position of authority, people will be looking for your verbal and non verbal cues and triggers – so it might be a good idea to understand what sort of behaviours you send out to the world. We all have good days and bad days, but its better to deliberately invest in new behaviours and that means 'enabling your team to act'. Through extensive L&D you can harvest big and long lasting results.

In our workshops we use a variety of models for reflecting on our styles and how we impact others. I prefer a Jungian profile not dissimilar to Myers Briggs – we use them interchangeably and from the various types we distil these down to four 'pure types' regulator, visionary, facilitator and analyst. By understanding how to deal with them, one is much more confident and can practise new behaviours. Managers have a much better grasp of things if they can focus on broad 'types' rather than trying to follow every nuance of specific types. Our development is focused on how people move through different 'personality stances' depending on the prevailing challenges and pressures during their day. We argue strongly that no one type is perfect or ideal, but being able to be flexible and adapt

Being able to be flexible and adapt to the circumstances is the key to influencing others

to the circumstances is the key to influencing others. With practice one can swiftly identify the objections that others have to your proposals in advance of their raising them.

Typical content of workshops

- Your personal authenticity and developing a win-win attitude at all times
- Understanding the process of influence and setting a

'yes' frame

- Building rapport with your sponsors and those who don't like the change
- Understanding resistance to change and turning it to acceptance
- Utilising benefits and features to a win-win advantage
- Utilising seven assertive techniques to make your point
- Practising listening skills
- Focusing on the gentle use of power and influence
- Becoming a confident negotiator and using higher authority
- Dealing with giving bad news
- De-escalation of conflict – bringing things back from the edge
- Quickly respond using solution-based questioning
- Using conversational psychometrics and Jungian analysis of personality
- Handling personality objections
- Identifying motivational drivers in others
- Using the four quadrant personality tool
- Analysing conscious and unconscious behaviour
- Developing your self confidence and self esteem
- Learning how to use six influencing strategies

Summary: Until behaviour changes, nothing changes

Organisations can devote resource to methodologies to bring about change but the real changes start to take place when organisations develop their internal capability to drive improvement. This comes about by seriously tackling the soft skill shortage experienced, and the unwillingness to lead and challenge the way things are done.

Organisations require more of their technical experts to consolidate their technical and functional mastery, and build an arsenal of tools and techniques around them to lead to significant behavioural change and organisational improvement for the new business models we must grasp in all sectors.

Focus needs to be on designing the process around the current and future challenges, and be tailored specifically to the organisation. Progress should be mapped, and the change coached through an intensive post workshop process that ensures their behaviours are installed and hard wired for use in leading and mastering the process of change. The time is ripe for any organisation to develop their line managers and technical experts into a formidable force.



Philip Atkinson is a consultant specialising in strategic, behavioural and cultural change. He is a member of various training consortia and has recently focused on creating innovative business simulations through Learning Strategies Ltd. He consults in the UK, Europe and US, has written seven business books and published many

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