

A Quantum View of Change Management

Each year there are more and more views on the “right” way to carry out change management in organisations. For the last few centuries we have seen the Newtonian view of the world take centre stage. This is viewing the business as a machine that can be separated into parts and managed accordingly.

More recently the systems thinking approach was developed. This approach sees the organisation as an entire system with many parts that make up the whole. Each part requires focus and attention and all parts are interdependent and cyclically linked.

We believe there is now an even broader and deeper perspective that needs to be considered. This is the Quantum multi-dimensional view of the world that takes the level of interconnectedness and interdependence to a much more critical level. Quantum physics has progressed the idea of interconnectedness over the last 80 years. It promotes a perspective or world view of seeing the whole (business) as an integrated, multidimensional and deeply interconnected organism. The impacts of this are profound and far reaching. Generally speaking you cannot separate an organism - a living creature - into many pieces and then put it back together hoping it all fits properly!

Using the Quantum view of the world we in fact need to move from our paradigm of linear thinking and cause and effect to one of multi dimensional interconnectedness - one where many dimensions are impacted instantaneously. When we look at change management in this light it is evident that change will need to be managed differently.

There are many papers and theories written on change management and it is well known that most change programs fail. A 20 year study of change programs shows that 10% of them have a negative impact on an organisation, 53% no impact and 37% a positive impact (UNSW, Managing Change, 2009). When we take a quantum view of change management we can now begin to understand more fully why this has been happening.

Clients often ask us our view on the best time to bring in a change management strategy. The answer to this question is simple ... as soon as you think you want to change something you need to be working on the change management component. We often see major transformational programs take the Newtonian view, where they work in parts, often in isolation to each other. They work across a very linear project plan, which does not allow for flexibility of change as the environment changes.

Where systems' thinking is already introduced in an organisation, we often see a far more integrated approach to change management. Generally though, change is still managed in a very linear fashion. There is often a set project plans that may cover all aspects of the change and this is essential. However once the change has been integrated and perhaps a review completed, the project team will leave, hoping that the embedding has worked. How often do we see that 12 months later the change has failed and people have reverted to the old way of doing things?

Taking a Quantum view all aspects of the change program would be managed together and dynamically. This would include reviewing and managing the total system the program was running within, as well as a review of the impact on people and culture. The program would be strongly supported with a governance structure that is dynamic and flexible and allows for rapid changes and decisions to be made to support the new system. In the past we would have seen days if not weeks go by before decisions could be made around change. By then everything has continued to move. What we highlight here is that not only does the change management need to be dynamic but all aspects related to the change do as well. This includes such things as governance and decision making.

Take the example of the delivery of a new process. The quantum approach would not only develop the process but would also assess, manage and monitor any impact on the people, culture and system it operates within. This approach takes in the total picture and as any environmental changes occur (as they tend to daily in businesses) these are also re-assessed as part of the whole. The system is dynamic and ensures rapid changes can be made as necessary without being cumbersome. If the change is not managed from a dynamic perspective we would find that the process that is embedded will not match the environment that it needs to operate within. This is why all elements need to be managed together.

We believe strong change management of the future will be those that can take a quantum view and have systems in place that support the multi-dimensional and interconnected nature of the business they are working within.