

# First Published London Connects and eGov Monitor Change Management – The Importance of Feedback

by Barry Tuckwood



During the past few months we have considered different aspects of change and project management, most recently in discussions of the benefits of finding a common goal, and of the normal natural emotional reactions to change, an aspect which drew on the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. Summarising these, people need an appropriate motivator, and there is a normal natural cycle of anxiety and acceptance in personal response mechanisms.

For these articles we have used case study material developed during the National Projects and parallels with life-changing events such as bereavement. We have also considered them in the light of management's continuing need to enable improvement, the source of both routine incremental and sudden dramatic change. While we have a predictive model for personal reaction to change, expressed graphically in Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's work, we are not able to exactly forecast any individual's actual reactions. We can only know what we observe or are told. We need information from the various stakeholders affected by the change in order to understand what is practical from a technical point of view, and what is acceptable from an emotional point of view. Overall, therefore, we need constructive critical feedback.

Where does feedback begin? When we want to change something we are appealing to the person's largely emotional perception of the vision they share with the organisation. The beginning for them is when they first have the opportunity to engage in understanding, agreeing to or forming that vision. In principle,

executive management may have an idea, everyone else has their opinions, they provide feedback, management modifies the idea, or the way they describe the idea, or the benefits that are expected if the change occurs. If you are seeking a positive setting from which to start, the many stakeholders must be able to share your vision. If your vision is not shared there is resentment; your colleagues will in extreme cases become disillusioned, dismissive, and may well undermine your view. To maximise success everyone in the organisation needs to have a shared vision.

It is from this shared vision that you will be able to develop a strategy and then an implementation plan, with one or more projects to lead the strategy to fruition. The projects will be in line with the strategy and therefore in line with the vision. Everyone who has contributed and bought into that vision will be able to participate constructively in the projects.

So the feedback process can and should begin during the vision-forming stage. By setting the scene as one of engagement there will be an expectation of general progress reports, announcements, and perhaps group discussion. While at a tactical level you are running the projects, and want to ensure that you have the necessary controls in place, there is a wider need for communication with the stakeholders in the project. Once the feedback cycle has been begun it needs to be maintained.

We can draw a parallel with our everyday experiences and observations. The vast majority of us start the day intending to do a good job;

and as our careers progress we want to do an increasingly good job, and help others to do theirs. The competitive and supportive spirit is one we learned in the playground: children learn, for example, how to skip, and the more able skip better; they then pass on their skill to their friends and to younger children. The more skilled and the less skilled pass ideas backwards and forwards, they test those ideas, and with few exceptions skills develop. There is a vision: do it better; and a strategy: learn from each other.

This whole process of enhancement and improvement requires a lot of communication: showing, listening, testing, reviewing. Feedback happens all the time. It begins at the vision stage and continues throughout. This continuous engagement demonstrated through feedback develops cooperation and commitment, vital for organisational success.

How can we develop this aspect of communication to make sure that it is incorporated in the way we develop our organisations? I'd like to explore that in a future article.

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