

Change Management – Rolling Acceptance

by Barry Tuckwood



You might recall that in an earlier article (August 2005) also published in eGov monitor

www.egovmonitor.com/node/2175

I used the description provided by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross of the process of change that people go through when faced with a situation which they find complex. The steps begin with shock and denial that there is a change, and proceed through fear and anger because they do not want to face the change, acceptance of the change and its likely effects, commitment to those changes and finally growth from that commitment.

As managers, how can we apply that knowledge of the way that people react to the real situations that we face?

The solution is in how we engage people whose working patterns and operating processes and procedures are subject to change. How would it be for you if you turned up to work one day to find that fairly basic processes were changed; for example you might be used to logging on to your PC at your own desk within your own identifiable surroundings on a Friday, but on Monday you are engaged in 'hot-desking' and are expected to log on anywhere, you have none of your usual semi-domestic environment, nowhere to keep your own 'stuff', and your neighbours at work are now different?

I am sure that you would be less than thrilled; that you would feel disorientated; that the post-weekend banter that you had come to expect would be absent and you would feel a sense of loss. This would occur even if, as is the case for many of us, you actually spend less than 60% of your time at your desk, and it might be as little as 20% once site visits, client visits, meetings and conferences have been taken into account. In short, you hardly need to be there but you still want to feel at home on those occasions when you are. We could apply this analogy to a host of other situations all of which boil down to comfort with the familiar and discomfort with change.

What would happen if the change occurred in increments, or if we were participants in the change and could influence it during its development? An easier acceptance I am sure.

In projects this is 'rolling acceptance' which requires the following steps:

- Identification of the stakeholders: broadly all of those whose work and processes will change because of the project;
- Regular communication with them to ensure that we properly understand their views, their possible resistances, and their general attitudes so that we can consider them in the project; note that this is not the same as telling

them all what we are doing which would not be as helpful because it would not seek any feedback from them;

- Regular summaries outlining the agreed position in a way that enables acceptance while allowing people to question and refine the results.

Obtaining this rolling acceptance requires serious commitment of time and effort, but it is much better than meeting complete resistance if you were to try to deliver a new way of working without sufficient engagement of those it affects the most.

Summarising, we need to help people through Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's change curve by recognising the process they go through when dealing with change. The best way of doing this is to work our way through it with them, rather than try to thrust a finished new process upon them.

Barry Tuckwood is the Programme Manager for Valuebill, one of the National Projects.

www.londonconnects.org.uk/valuebill.cfm
www.newham.gov.uk/valuebill.

Please provide feedback to:

barry@tuckwood.co.uk
www.tuckwood.com

Useful Resources :

www.ogc.gov.uk