



## Topics:

- The emperor in new clothes?
- Would you like to come up and see my etchings?
- Change and facilitation (1)
- Change and facilitation (2)
- This too shall pass
- How you get everybody to do a little to achieve a lot
- You can't teach an old dog new tricks
- What's in a word?

If The Hat Fits, Wear It



## The emperor in new clothes?

We were working with one of the world's major oil companies as part of a team implementing a leadership development program. We were meeting the usual resistance we had come to expect to the traditional approaches organisations tend to adopt when they want to change behaviour or to develop the competence of their workforce. Not from everybody, but from a significant number of the participants.

At one point in the early stages of this program, the Managing Director was addressing a large group of managers and team leaders and fielding the usual objections to an initiative of this nature. One team leader made the comment that this exercise would be another waste of time. He complained that every year there was some new initiative or project to which they were exposed and that next year when this current initiative was finished there would undoubtedly be another one.

The Managing Director reflected a moment before he responded. He said (words to this effect – I've added quite a few of my own, but they reflect the theme of his comments), "You are absolutely correct. Last year it was the 'X' initiative. The year before it was the 'Y' initiative. The year before that it was the 'Z' initiative. And you are right again. Next year there will probably be another new initiative. And another one the year after that. And none of them were or will be perfectly successful.

But each one adds some value to the way we do our business. Each one progresses us a little further than where we would be had we not taken on this initiative. Each one adds something to our consciousness, to our awareness. Even if it only serves to show the divisions that exist amongst us and warn us that we still have much to do.

Each initiative provides its own learnings even when they appear to be unsuccessful and disruptive if we are tuned into those learnings. Each initiative is another step, no matter how small it may be, in the evolution of our company.

The fact that we implement these initiatives – even the ones you deemed to have failed - in the constant search for better ways to manage the complex issues that frustrate and vex all of us, shows us that we are responsive, we are growing, we are willing to try things, we are adapting to our changing environment.

Consider the consequences if we had done nothing all these years as our competitors and markets and the nature of our workforce and the laws and regulations governing the workplace were changing around us."

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We, and many of the managers, learned something that day from the Managing Director's response.

We had another interesting learning from the same project. The project leaders decided (reasonably we thought) to make this new initiative - team leader development – compulsory. Did the proverbial hit the fan? You bet. There were about 55 team leaders who were part of the target group of frontline managers. On hearing that the program would be compulsory, we immediately got about 40% of them off side and we never really got them back on side.

The decision to make it compulsory was based on some sound reasons. It would be beneficial if all team leaders were exposed to the same leadership concepts and skills. The experienced people could share their learnings with the less experienced people. It would detract from the objectives of the program if you had only half the team leaders going through it. The operators would experience inconsistencies in the approaches adopted by those team leaders participating in the program and those not. It would be difficult for team leaders participating in the program to implement new ways of doing things if the other half were maintaining the status quo.

Some of the resistance of the team leaders may have been 'bloody mindedness' based on old wounds. The company had had a long festering problem of the 'them and us' variety. (I remember a symptom of that gulf when I was doing a project with the same company back in 1980. The blue-collar workers (the operators) ate their lunch all sitting on one side of the cafeteria, the white-collar workers (management) all sat on the opposite side.)

Another reason was that some of the team leaders had been team leaders for 25 – 30 years, nearing retirement and they couldn't see any benefit for them. Others were more specialists with only one person and sometimes none reporting to them. Still others complained because nearly everyone from the one area was expected to attend the many workshops that made up the program leaving no one to manage the workload. Some came to the program expecting to be hand fed and didn't like the idea of taking responsibility for their own learning.

Fortunately, many of the participants applied themselves enthusiastically and, to their credit, even the disgruntled ones mostly participated fully and shared their experiences and learnings.

From our part, with the wonderful vision of hindsight, there were definitely some things that we would do differently and better. But I always wondered about the strength of the resistance of such a large minority.

In my view, the main resistance was probably simply because they were told that they must do it. Compulsory versus voluntary? Food for thought



## .Would You Like To Come Up And See My Etchings?

Things look better merely by being divided into their parts, since they then seem to surpass a greater number of things than before. The same effect is produced by piling up facts.

Aristotle, 384-322 BC, Greek philosopher and teacher, Works

First learn the meaning of what you say, and only then speak.

Epictetus, c60-120, Roman Stoic philosopher, Discourses

What is one of the most important skills for today's manager? The skill of persuasion - changing people's mindsets. Like it or not, today's workforce is better educated, more aware of their rights, more inclined to have several jobs or even careers during their work life, has clearer and greater expectations and are not motivated to do things just out of respect for authority. 'My way or the highway' doesn't really wash any more either.

**Here are a number of things that you can say or do to help you change people's mindsets:**

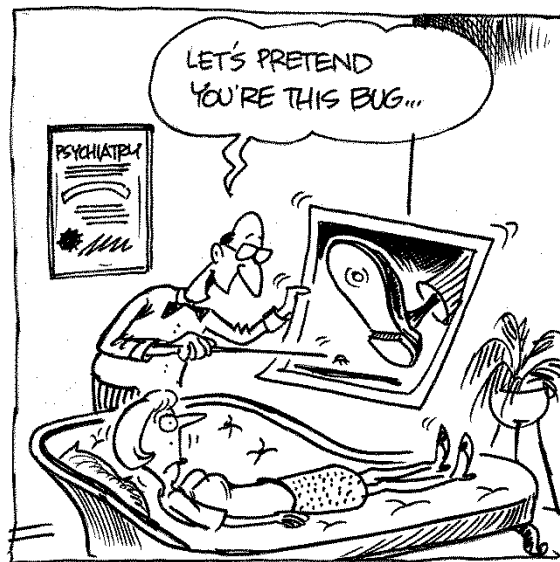
- ❑ Show empathy for their view of the situation. Pretend that you are them acting on their perspectives or the information that they have available to them. Interpret that information the way they seem to be whether you agree with it or not. Think about their unmet needs or wants. Think about the things they are fearful of losing in this situation.
- ❑ What are the current beliefs they could hold about the situation? What could be better beliefs that you could explore with them – ones that serve them better? What are the current meanings they could give to those beliefs? What are meanings that could serve them better?
- ❑ Work on the power of 'why'. Give people the context. Show the connections, how issues are directly or indirectly joined, how things weave together.
- ❑ Make your appeal personal. "Look I know that you don't want to do this, but I really need you to do this for these reasons..."
- ❑ Ask, "What has to happen so that we can progress in a way that is suitable for both of us?"
- ❑ Ask, "What's happening here that I am unaware of? What things aren't as they appear to be? What am I doing that is blocking progress here? What might be threatening to you about what I am proposing? What things haven't I considered from your point of view? Check their view of the 'emotional costs' to them associated with your proposition.
- ❑ What are your concerns about how others will react to you? What are the likely reactions from others? How will you deal with that?

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- ❑ Forget about what your head is saying for a moment. What's your intuition saying – your gut feeling?
- ❑ What might you be fearful of losing if you go ahead with my proposition? What's unfair about my proposal or my reasoning?"
- ❑ Paint a picture of how the change looks if we accept this proposition. Describe the specific benefits for them.
- ❑ Check if they are clear on the exact actions which would be required from them to implement the change. Check if they believe that they have the confidence and the competence to take the first steps.
- ❑ Explore their perception of the degree of effort required from them to implement the change.
- ❑ Explore their perception of the value of the change to them.
- ❑ Explore their perception of the probability that the proposition will be successful.
- ❑ Explore the reasons for their resistance.
- ❑ Explore their level of dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs. Explain why the current state is unsatisfactory. Explain how the desired change will increase their level of satisfaction.
- ❑ Ask, "Where does it leave us if we don't go ahead with this change? What are the wider consequences for all of us if we reject this change now?"





## Change and Facilitation (1)

“A sudden, bold, and unexpected question doth many times surprise a man and lay him open.”

Francis Bacon, 1561-1624, Lord Chancellor of England, *Of Cunning*

“If we must disagree, let’s disagree without being disagreeable.”

Lyndon Baines Johnson, 1908-1973, Thirty-sixth President of the United States, Remark to U. S. Senators, 1965

“Would you persuade, speak of interest, not of reason.”

Benjamin Franklin, 1706-1790, American printer and statesman, *Poor Richard’s Almanac*

**G**etting agreement between different parties with different needs and vested interests is a tricky proposition. More so when people rely on their status or authority to get what they want rather than seek outcomes that are fair and reasonable to all parties. The first stage in the facilitation process should address this potential problem.

Your first meeting should set the agenda. This is an important part of the facilitation process because it is here that you can clarify the purpose and establish expectations. This is where you work to gain agreement on the way we will conduct ourselves. It is at this stage of the process that you attempt to get a commitment from all parties that we are here to meet the reasonable and justifiable needs of all parties. You need to create an acceptance that the pie is only so big and there will need to be give and take from all parties.

At this first meeting, we suggest you focus on four things.

### 1. Context

Why we are here; the ‘big picture’; the organisational benefit; link to strategic plan; background for what we are doing; weaving or linking together to form a connected whole; the set of circumstances; the part or parts preceding or following a situation as determining or helping to reveal its meaning and purpose; surroundings; environment; setting.

When you are facilitating your meetings provide the context to the participants. Describe the typical context for your situation.



## 2. Space

The freedom we have to act with confidence; the authority we have to act; the degree of decision making we have without referring to a higher level; identification of overlap into other areas.

The key reason we suggest you tackle this is because of the likelihood of people 'pulling status'.

How will you create a situation where there is this space in decision making? What can you say at the beginning of the meeting that will ensure all participants have equal say? Keep the issue of status and the line of authority in mind when you answer this question.

## 3. Limits

The constraints the organisation or government policy places on our decision making; where we should not venture past; defines accountabilities; describe the ethics, standards and principles of the organisation; restrictions.

As facilitator your role is to lead and steer the discussion.

There will be times that some discussion will wander outside the agreed 'limits'.

Where is this likely to occur? What limits will you impose? (Be prepared to give a reason).

## 4. Support

Underwrites the quality of what is trying to be achieved; assists with development; provides us with the confidence to move forward; provides for opportunity for coaching, learning and overcoming setbacks.

Where is support most likely to be needed during the decision making process? How will you provide this?



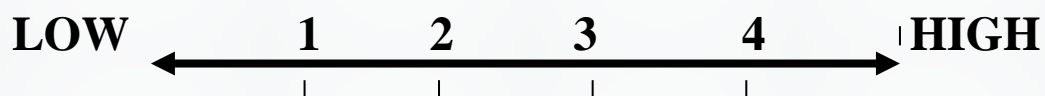
## Change and Facilitation (2)

Here is a tool to change the way agreements are facilitated between parties with vested interests where a budget or resources or facilities are to be allocated.

### Agreement Matrix

CRITERIA										
ITEM										Etc.
Etc.										

### NEED



Rate the criteria for each of the items listed.

### Instructions for the facilitator:

1. Under the heading 'ITEM' list all the things that are to be negotiated and agreed. Ask the participants what other 'ITEMS' they think should be in the list. Decide as a group whether or not to include items that are essential. You will need to ensure that of the essential items you do list, you agree 'how big' and 'how many'.
2. In the space next to 'CRITERIA' list all the things that will influence the final decision. Ask the participants to suggest any other factors that should



be considered. Note the wording of the 'CRITERIA' needs to be such that the rating scale can measure LOW or HIGH need in a consistent way.

## Some suggestions (examples only):

- Importance of item to the overall organisation.
- Ability of item to be used for other purpose/s
- Inaccessibility of item in other areas
- Ability to be accessed by other areas
- Perceived frequency of use
- Value for money
- Inability to access similar items
- Need for that item in the local community, .etc.

Your initial research will help you identify both the 'ITEMS' and 'CRITERIA'. Obtain the costing estimates for each item before you commence the meeting. Make sure you are familiar with any budgetary issues, e.g. range, funding sources. When constructing your 'agreement matrix', consult with the key stakeholders as part of your research.

1. Ask each participant to rate each item against the criteria using the 1 to 5 rating scale.
2. Ask them to calculate a total for each item.
3. Record each total on the **Master Matrix (see example below)**.
4. Identify where there are obvious differences of opinion as to the need for the item.
5. Ask the people with differing points of view to explain why they rated the item as they did.
6. Ask others to contribute to the discussion.
7. After discussion, ask participants to adjust their ratings where they have had a change of thinking and then adjust the overall totals where necessary. Do not allow 'trade-offs' or side negotiations.
8. Check with all participants that this is a fair and equitable process.

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## MASTER MATRIX

PARTICIPANT TOTALS ITEM									Etc.	GROUP TOTAL	RANK
1.											
2.											
3.											
4.											
5.											
6.											
Etc.											



## This Too Shall Pass

Long term employees become battle-hardened after constant exposure to the latest organisation fads and initiatives which periodically sweep through their workplace. They've seen or heard it all before – the hype, the promises of a new world, the threats of job loss or extinction if we don't adapt or embrace the latest fad. The wizened employees don't get too excited about the new initiative. They know all too well that when all the hullabaloo has died down, things will pretty much be the same except that everybody has learned some new words.

Organisation fads and initiatives are usually devised by academics, management gurus and others who have often never worked as an employee in the real world of commerce or industry. While these people are well meaning, albeit with an eye to fortune and fame, their initiatives often have little relevance to the real world of the worker.

Some years ago, before I saw the light, I was unfortunately mixed up with a couple of sales trainers engaged by a bank in Queensland. The lead trainer had devised a training program whose real objective – getting more money out of the bank's clients – was supposed to be hidden by a so called 'soft message' to bank staff. I dutifully conducted the training program as devised by the lead trainer despite my discomfort with his approach. I've always remembered a quiet aside from one bank employee to another at the end of the training program – "here we go again...flog more product."

The problem with too many organisation initiatives is that they don't engage the worker because they are not grounded in the world of the worker and are not valued by the worker.

Some years later, after I had seen the light, we were engaged ourselves to implement an organisation-wide initiative. Brace yourself because I am now going to unashamedly plug my MAPP™ System. But bear with me because there are learnings here which will help you as a manager ensure that the organisation initiatives which you are a part of do engage the workers.

Our client was an organisation of 4,000 employees whose main purpose was the administration of justice and the imprisonment of those who had strayed from the straight and narrow. For a variety of reasons, the morale of this organisation was rock bottom.

As part of our process, we facilitated 20 one-day workshops for 307 managers to show them how to use our tool. As the managers reluctantly shuffled in at the start of our workshops, their body language was plain to see. They did not want to be there. Believe me it is quite daunting when you look up and see 15 or so mostly hostile faces at the start of a workshop.



Their thoughts were obvious and, as they happily told us later, typified by comments such as these:

- ◆ Another stupid initiative dreamt up by the Human Resources Department.
- ◆ I'm so busy trying to get my job done and I have to spend a whole day here.
- ◆ Here we go again. What a waste of time this will be.
- ◆ More bullshit.
- ◆ This will go the same way as other initiatives – a lot of fancy words and rhetoric and nothing will change.
- ◆ As usual, this will have little relevance to my job or the problems that I have to deal with.

While we won't claim that we turned 100% of these managers around, we will claim that 90% of them moved from being poorly disposed to our process to being very positive about our process. As the one day workshops unfolded, we saw the body language change. People went from scowling to smiling. Why? My zip was undone. No. This is how we engaged these people:

- They were invited, but not forced to use our tool. The message was, "if you see value in this, use it. If you see no value in this, don't use it." If we wanted them to use it, then the onus was on us to convince them of the value.
- We took complex issues and amorphous concepts and turned them into simple, doable actions.
- They had ownership and control over the process and the decisions made relating to actions they would implement.
- We gave them a concrete tool – a framework and structured process – that they could easily follow with their people in the workplace.
- We set it up as an on-going workplace process - not a one-off training event.
- We were able to convince them that the process was transparently fair and democratic.
- We created a supportive context.
- We were able to show them how our tool would really help them in the workplace dealing with their issues and their problems.
- We were able to show them how our tool would help them engage their own staff.
- We made sure that the critical first steps to follow were simple, doable and valuable.

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- We were able to show them that the benefits of using our process far outweighed the 'costs' in terms of time, effort and emotional risk (fear of failure and fear of ridicule).



## How You Get Every Body to Do A Little To Achieve A Lot

**Before I developed the MAPP™ System, we never knew if we really made any difference to organisation performance.** We would receive mostly high ratings on the 'happy sheet' evaluations filled in by participants in our training workshops. (Next to useless as an indicator of application back in the workplace.)

But did we ever cause any long term problems to be resolved? Did we have any real impact on the bottom line? Did we leave the organisation a little better off than it was before we intervened? Did we create any sustainable positive change? Did we change any counter-productive behaviours back in the workplace? Maybe? Possibly? Hopefully? As I stated earlier, we never really knew.

(After about 35 years in the management consulting game, I have come to the conclusion that, by and large, organisations can get on quite nicely without the intervention of most management consultants.)

So we were pretty chuffed when one of our clients reported a 15% rise in production volume four months into using our process. (There were other factors, but they acknowledged our 'tool' was a significant factor.) By the way, that 15% rise in production volume was worth about \$20,000 per month. Not bad for an outlay of about \$10,000.

**So what did we do that made a difference?** As a manager, you can use this as a checklist to increase your chances of success the next time you act to change (improve) the performance of your workgroup.

- ❑ The client chose to focus on something that, if they could improve it, would make a real difference to the bottom line. As a manufacturer using heavy-duty plant and equipment, they chose to focus on improving maintenance (but you can do this to improve any key function).
- ❑ We developed a list of specific actions that if all the key personnel were to **willingly** start doing or do better would improve maintenance in this plant.
- ❑ We then formed a group made up of all the key people who could have an influence on whether or not we could improve the maintenance function. The company has a workforce of about 42 people on this particular site. The people involved directly were the general manager of the works, the plant superintendent, the logistics manager, the production supervisor, the maintenance supervisor and the four shift foremen (they were all men). The operators (key people when it came to improving the maintenance function) were involved in the solutions, but were not part of this group. (However, this is recommended if possible).

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- ❑ We gave the group a framework – a structured process - so that they had a concrete methodology to follow.
- ❑ We allowed the group to decide the value of the maintenance actions in relation to improving maintenance and how effectively these actions were currently happening. So their opinions were incorporated and they had control over the decision making.
- ❑ We made sure that the rationale behind perceptions of all members of this group were brought into the open and explored.
- ❑ We gave them a process that allowed the exchange of perceptions to occur in a non-threatening and productive way.
- ❑ We facilitated this group in such a way that all members were treated as equals and participated as equals. The general manager was no more able to influence the process than anybody else.
- ❑ The group made decisions about actions they would take to improve maintenance which reflected the perceptions of all members.
- ❑ They made sure the actions chosen were important and doable.
- ❑ The operators of the plant and equipment were consulted and their input used in implementing actions to improve maintenance.
- ❑ Each member of the group agreed to take on a manageable number of actions so that the load was spread throughout the group.
- ❑ We explored and removed any mental blocks which could have stopped them from implementing the agreed actions.
- ❑ We showed the group how to use the art of reflection to gain insights and learnings from their experiences in implementing the agreed actions.
- ❑ The group agreed to meet on a regular basis every 2-3 weeks to discuss progress, share insights and learnings and agree next actions.
- ❑ We put in contingency actions so that the momentum would be maintained if key members of the group were unable to attend these meetings.
- ❑ We collected verifiable examples of improvements so that the group could see that they were making concrete improvements.
- ❑ We created a supportive context and a bias for action not talk.
- ❑ We made the process transparent, fair, enjoyable and intrinsically rewarding.
- ❑ We acknowledged and recognised right efforts as much as right results and we celebrated milestone successes.



## You Can't Teach An Old Dog New Tricks

The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, and breeds reptiles of the mind.  
William Blake, 1757-1827, English poet and artist, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*.

There is a certain relief in change, even though it be from bad to worse; as I have found travelling in a stagecoach, that it is often a comfort to shift one's position and be bruised in a new place.

Washington Irving, 1783-1859, American essayist and novelist, *Tales of a Traveller*.

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves.

Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865, Sixteenth President of the United States, Message to Congress, December 1, 1862.

It is one thing to be stiff and another to be steady in an opinion. The steady man changes when reason requires it, but the stiff-necked is at war with all reason.

Old Farmer's Almanac (1812).

Men like the opinions to which they have become accustomed from youth; this prevents them from finding the truth, for they cling to the opinions of habit.

Moses Maimonides, 1135-1204, Egyptian physician and philosopher, *Guide for the Perplexed*.

**Whenever we are assisting an organisation to implement and manage improvement or progress (that's what change should achieve), we base our process heavily on aligning the perceptions of the workforce.**

If the perceptions of the workforce aren't aligned – forget it. Well, not quite. But don't be surprised when things don't go according to the grand plan.

### Perceptions about what? Perceptions about:

- ❑ the context for change
- ❑ the need for change for the individual
- ❑ the main areas requiring a focus for change
- ❑ the priority of those focus areas
- ❑ the key actions required to bring about the change
- ❑ the importance of the key actions to the individual
- ❑ the extent that we are currently doing these key actions according to the individual



- ❑ the specific new or different actions required of individuals to bring about the change.

## **Perceptions are based on:**

- ❑ the context we know
- ❑ the information or knowledge we have
- ❑ the perspectives we take
- ❑ the interpretations we put on the above.

Why this emphasis on people's perceptions? Because we believe that a person's behaviour is heavily influenced by their perceptions (not your perceptions), amongst other things. A person's reality is defined by his or her perceptions. Perceptions are not right or wrong – they just are. They are the reality for the person who holds them. But perceptions can be inaccurate. They can be based on insufficient information or limited perspectives or incorrect interpretations or ignorance of the context.

## **How do you change or align perceptions?**

- ❑ By giving people new or different information or knowledge that they don't currently have. By challenging generalisations, exaggerations and assumptions propping up their current information base and replacing them with facts. By updating old information which doesn't reflect the changing circumstances.
- ❑ By giving people different ways of looking at information or circumstances. Notice how the term 'spin doctors' has crept into the language of late. Spin doctoring is a key function of governments and has been since governments existed. Governments employ 'spin doctors' to convince a disbelieving public that the latest bungle didn't even actually happen or that the latest misuse of taxpayer's money is actually in the very best interest of the public.
- ❑ By explaining alternative ways of interpreting information or events.
- ❑ By giving people the broader context, the bigger picture. By expanding their awareness of the holistic nature of things. By showing them the connections between all the parts of the whole.



## What's In A Word?

"The concept of progress acts as a protective mechanism to shield us from the terrors of the future."

Frank Herbert, Science fiction writer, *Dune* (Chilton, 1965)

"There are only two ways to get people to support corporate change. You should give employees the information they need to understand the reasons for change, and put enough influence behind the information to (gain their) support."

Carla O'Dell, President, O'Dell and Associates, *CFO*, October, 1987.

"All things are ready, if our minds be so."

William Shakespeare, 1564-1616, English dramatist and poet, *Henry the Fifth*

I got the idea for this article from John Lees, the motivator, trainer, speaker and corporate adviser. I was listening to the audio channel on a flight from Adelaide to Perth and John was speaking humorously and wisely about motivation.

Among many things, he was discussing the difference between the word change and the word progress. He suggested that progress is the better word. I agree with him 100% which no doubt will have John doing somersaults with glee.

Is this just playing around with semantics? I think not. Some people might say that change **is** progress. But for many people, the word change pushes their 'resistance' button straight away as they remember the many failed, never finished or poorly thought out initiatives to which they have been subjected all under the guise of change. 'Change' is a tarnished word in the minds of many employees. "Keep your head down. This too shall pass", is the cynical advice the old hands pass on to the new kids on the block.

So what's the difference? Change to many employees means pointless disruption, poorly considered initiatives, empire building by senior management, the latest fads (which invariably turn out to be another case of the 'emperor's new clothes'), vested interest projects, stupid or out of touch policies, etc. Change can be perceived by staff to be good or bad – useful or useless.

From the perspective of the workers, it often looks like a case of change for the sake of change. This is particularly so in relation to re-structuring. I know of one large organisation that underwent three re-structures in four years. What was actually achieved never became clear to the workers at the lower levels. Re-structuring seems to be a pastime popular amongst senior management.

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Progress, on the other hand, implies positive movement forward, steps in the right direction, getting closer to some desired state or goal, insight, awareness, enlightenment, meeting collective needs, growth, development, etc.

When planning and preparing to implement change in your workplace, it may help to bring the word 'progress' into the equation. Part of the selling of the change to the workforce would involve creating the context for change - acceptance of the need for and the benefits of the proposed change. And then posing the question to those responsible for implementing the change, "How can we make progress from where we are today to where we need to be tomorrow and achieve this progress in such a way that all stakeholder's needs are met as far as is possible?"

Or when management are planning to introduce change, part of the communication could include a section titled **PROGRESS**. Here they could spell out why this new initiative is progress. This would include a justification of the change; a demonstration of how the change will meet, as far as is possible, the needs of all stakeholders; identification of the outcomes and the benefits to be gained and what the desired state of affairs will be when the change is in place.

But here's the rub. It often appears to the workforce that management are unable to clearly define these things because they too often are unconvincing in their attempts to do so. Or, in the worst case examples, they don't even bother because the real motives for the change are not what they appear to be. Or management aren't really convinced themselves that the change is progress especially when the only driver is money. It takes extra effort and some hard thinking on the part of management when they are asked to demonstrate why the latest initiative is in fact progress.