

Improving effectiveness

Pensions
black hole
beckons

Working in partnership, CVA gives people a voice in shaping their business and empowers them to take a stake in its future success.

By **Peter Killwick**, Partner

POSITIVE PARTNERSHIP: DELIVERING CHANGE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR



“Our jobs just got more interesting.”

The words of an operations manager sum up the impact of a major change programme led by CVA for a large Whitehall department.

CVA helps clients to deliver value across all fronts: to customers, to stakeholders and to staff.

Our change programmes enable organisations to maximise the impact of their business or services through the introduction of dynamic new work systems and the promotion of new skills.

Mentors rather than consultants, we coach people on commercial methods and techniques, bringing the best practices to the public domain.

Making change work

“All the decisions are being made by consultants”.

It's a complaint heard in institutions across the public and private sectors whenever boards bring in external expertise and no effort is made to involve the rest of the organisation.

Lower
redundancy
payouts
warning

10

Protests against
public sector job cuts



Figures at a glance

27%

of civil servants agree that "I feel that change is managed well in this department." (Institute for Government research 2010)

15%

of government change programmes achieve their objectives (Bridge Management Group)

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This can be particularly unsettling when significant change programmes are being implemented.

Many of these initiatives fail because the workforce does not “buy in” to the rationale and direction of the programmes. A pivotal influence is a perception that change has been imposed with little or no consultation.

At CVA, we understand that the contribution of employees is crucial. Our ethos is to foster a genuine involvement and contribution to the decision-making process.

This way, we empathetically help to shape an organisation’s future by securing the wide-ranging support of its personnel based on an understanding of the “why” and “how” of change.

Change programmes need to be underpinned by a clear strategy, reflecting both the current and future operating environment of the organisation and with clear objectives and lines of responsibility.

Staff need to be enabled to focus on key issues such as what their organisation does well, what it should do well but does not, and what it does and should not be doing at all, rather than being concerned with past failures.

This situation is more significant in the public sector where multiple stakeholder needs have to be met: society, the taxpayer, political and legislative imperatives, the needs and rights of employees and strategic partnerships.

Addressing these various needs – which can exert conflicting influence over direction and outcomes – presents the executive of public bodies with a complex “balancing act” between the often-divergent demands.

Additionally, public sector bodies have evolved alongside frequent changes in the political and social environment, including legislative requirements. These inevitably leave a very long “tail” of marginal activities that demand time and effort across the organisation without adding any significant value.

The identification of these “effort sinks” is a crucial first step on the road to improving efficiency and effectiveness.

Communication and collaboration

All too often, overstretched departments expensively outsource work to contractors in the external market. This hampers internal skill development, creates unhelpful sub-cultures and, as they often become semi-permanent practices, leads to ongoing expenditure.

Finding solutions and development paths are key to resolving these issues and provide a more interesting, varied and skill-driven environment for staff.

Introducing flexibility and training through such initiatives as our “shared skills framework” equips personnel with new skills, frees them from the silo mentality (endemic in many public organisations) and maximises their contribution in a focused and strategic way.

As a result, rather than call for interims or contractors as was done in the past, internal departments now call on the support of trained-up colleagues from other parts of their shared skill centre.

For public sector clients in particular, this delivers genuine value to the taxpayer, as it has proven to be highly effective in reducing expenditure.

However, the main benefits lie in increasing staff engagement and satisfaction as well as underpinning and driving a culture change.

Our preferred method includes the overhauling of appraisal systems so that they are more transparent, more specific in terms of the skills required and allow for a clearer path for individuals to progress through the grades.

Moreover, the auditing of the internal skills base enables management to identify gaps in expertise and introduce training courses tailored to address the shortages.

The benefits are considerable: not only are employees motivated through the acquisition of new career-progressing skills, but the organisation is also primed to increase effectiveness, profitability and public value.