

# Making projects work: It's about people

## From Possibility...

Having spent almost twenty years working in or with the public sector I've witnessed a few IT disasters. Some of these have been related to the technology but most have been a failure to understand people's requirements, or barriers to people using the IT effectively.

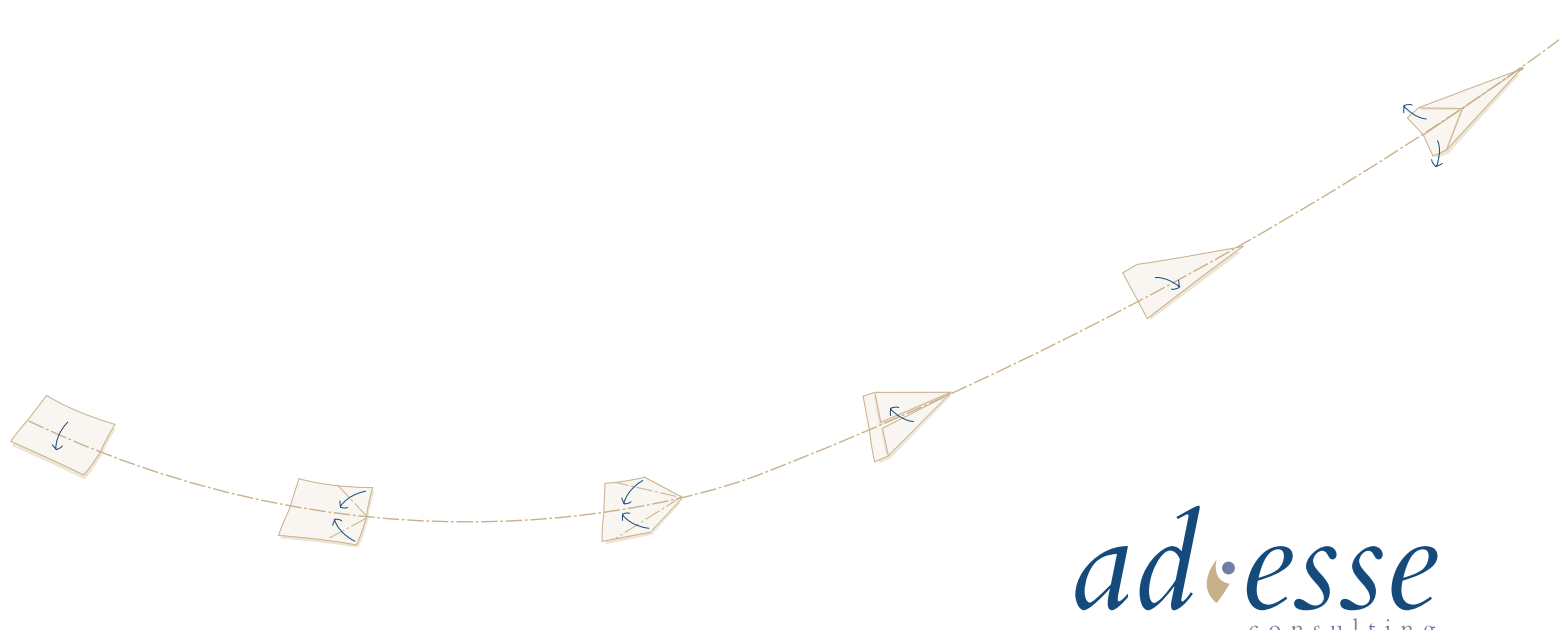
The problems have not been caused by the failure of IT professionals to "tick the right boxes", many are programmers after all, but in a failure to "press the right buttons" with the people the system needs to interact with and handle the people side of change associated with such large scale projects.

Massive strides have been made in the underpinning project methodologies used for large programmes of change across organisations and much of this has been driven by IT professionals. However it's understandable, given the background to these methods, that most are big on "process and methods" and small on "people and change". You need to pay equal attention to both to make projects deliver!

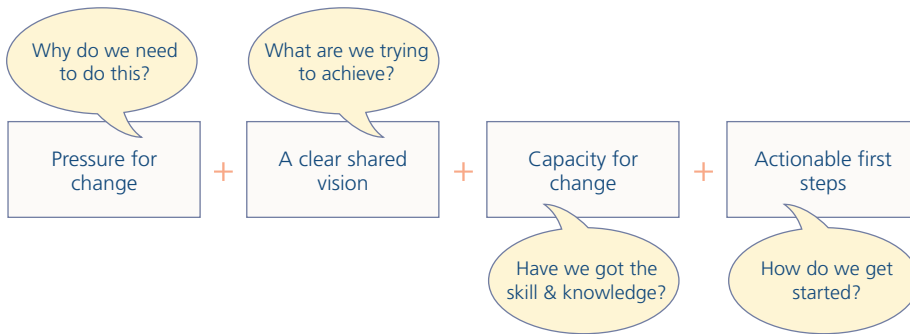
## FROM BAA TO BBC

We work with many organisations to support their project management approach. From BAA to the BBC the key thing their project approaches have in common is people and change.

The project approach may be subtly different between our clients, but the difference between success and failure isn't to do with how many "gateway" reviews they build into their project management process or how detailed the Project Initiation Documentation is.



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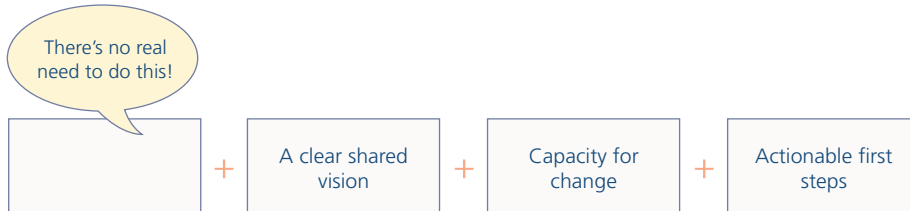


That's why we underpin our project management work with a deep understanding of the principles of effective change management.

If you recognise any of the following symptoms with your projects then it's probably a limited understanding of the people issues relating to change, as opposed to a problem with your project management approach (although we would always help you to examine the approach as well!).

### NO PRESSURE FOR CHANGE

It's amazing, given how much pressure people are under in most organisations, that we still find organisations with literally "hundreds" of projects (or more worryingly, no idea how many projects they have on the go at any one time!). Projects can be perceived as taking us away from delivering the "day job" and if there is no real pressure for change you need to question if you should be doing it at all. However, very often there is a real pressure for change, but it simply hasn't been communicated.



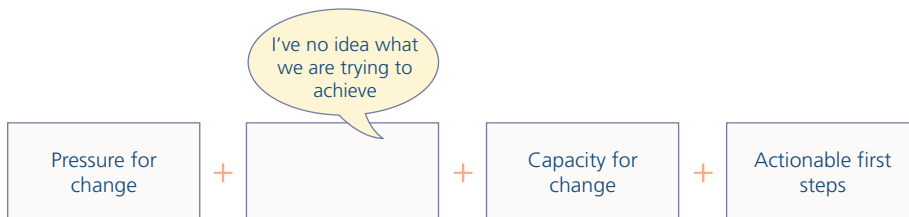
**Result = Bottom of the "IN" Tray!**

If you find this happening to your project you may need to:

- Ensure that those leading the change are firmly committed to it
  - If change is an optional extra, it won't happen
- Address resistance through communication, persuasion, training or situational change
  - Resistance will not go away unless you or your managers do something to make it go away
- Ensure that you and the leaders address individuals as well as groups
  - Messages put across during a one-to-one are often much better understood than in a group session, particularly if there are opportunities for questions and feedback

One tool we use to provide focus for communications and influencing activity is Stakeholder Analysis. If however, there really is no pressure for change you need to consider stopping the project. Having an effective project management and reporting system is essential in not starting as many projects and killing projects off which are no longer aligned to the organisation's aims, or are simply failing to deliver.

## LACK OF A DEFINED AND COMMUNICATED AND SHARED VISION



**Result = A quick start that fades out!**

This problem is compounded as many projects mix up deliverables with objectives. We've seen project proposals which have "develop a plan for sustainable communities" as an objective! If people cannot see how a project is contributing to what the organisation is trying to achieve, or if people do not buy into the change or see the benefits, then when the going gets tough, progress will fade or grind to a halt.

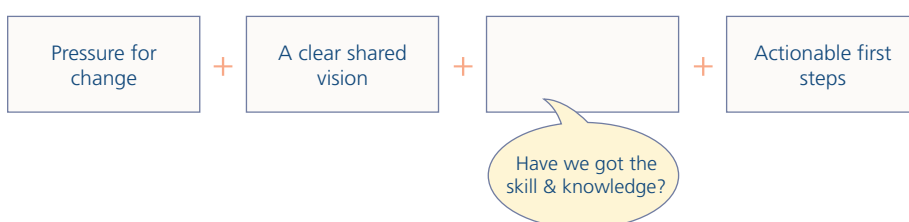
If this is happening to your projects you need to consider if you have effectively:

- Shared the vision for the project
- Defined and communicated the benefits your project will effect
- Identified and managed the fact that projects and change will always provides opportunities, as well as threats for people and teams
- Been open and honest and challenged secrecy... don't blame the audience for a bad reaction, find out why they think what they think and take their views on board!

Techniques relating to benefits mapping and realisation, business case development and defining SMART objectives and deliverables are essential to underpin a shared and measurable vision for the project.

## FAILURE TO BUILD THE CAPACITY FOR CHANGE

**Result = Anxiety and Frustration!**



People will always resist changes if they do not feel confident they have the skills or capacity to deliver, as it is perceived as a threat rather than an opportunity. Change is uncomfortable, so don't make it more so by ignoring capability issues. Effective projects:

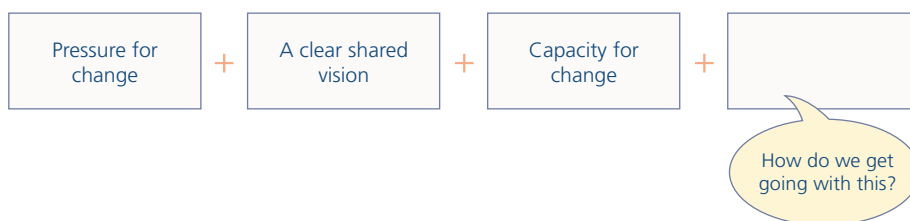
- Focus on training and enabling people to deliver new ways of working
  - People need to know how to do something, to be able to do it well

- Put 'expert' change-agents in place before the launch of the change
  - Support and expertise is what people need if a change is going to succeed
- Change the environmental factors that will block the success of the change
  - Create an environment for success

Tools such as Force Field Analysis and Solution Effect Analysis are key at this stage in identifying and managing the barriers to change, and Risk Analysis/Failure Prevention Analysis in ensuring risk is managed and the chances of successful implementation are maximised.

### CLEAR, ACTIONABLE FIRST STEPS ARE NOT DEFINED

**Result = Haphazard efforts and false starts!**



Many projects will be introducing new ways of working, or changing current practice. As with every change, you will probably encounter a certain degree of resistance and maybe a high degree of apathy... "we've tried it before and nothing changed". The vast majority of people will come on board when the talking and planning stops and the action starts and they can see the benefits. Whether the actionable first steps are seen through pilots or whole organisational roll-out, people believe what they see and experience, so it's vital that:

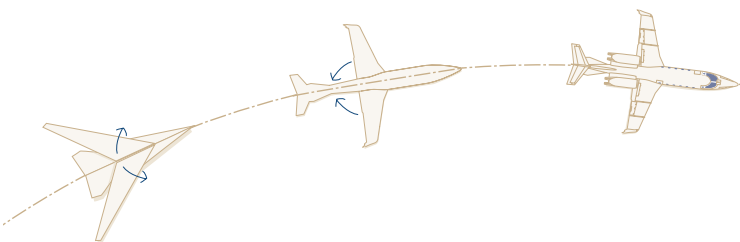
- You update and communicate project plans and follow through into action
  - Plans change and people need to be aware of how they have changed
  - Use regular progress meetings to highlight achievements
- You celebrate success
  - Success breeds success, so use each one well
- You measure progress against objectives, as well as milestones, and your measures drive the right behaviours which support what the project is trying to achieve
  - If you're introducing a new way of working then your old performance measures are unlikely to be suitable... what gets measured gets done!
- The project team members set an example and ensure that the organisation's leaders do the same
  - People are convinced by what they see happening and what managers are doing, not by what they are saying

Change control mechanisms, project reporting and communications and performance measurement are critical techniques to ensure plans are translated into visible, well-managed activity which inspires confidence in those involved in, or impacted by, the project.

## *...To Actuality*

With the number of projects going on in many organisations has there ever been a greater need to ensure people understand the principles of effective change management and can use a range of practical tools and techniques at the right time in project life cycles.

Ad Esse Consulting supports a number of private and public sector clients to develop and implement successful project approaches and the skills required to support their approach. A strong results focus and decades of experience in helping clients to make real, measurable changes and improvements underpin our project management services.



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