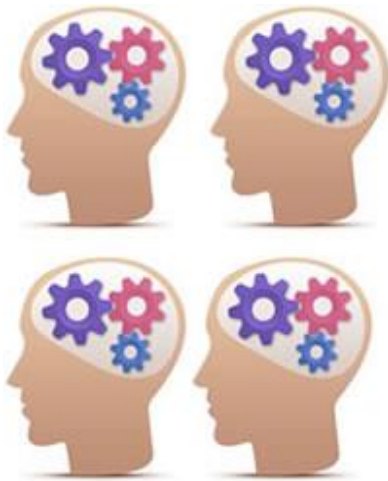


Making change stick



With so many examples of implementing change programs, it's hard to latch on to one great change program above all.

So why talk about what we've done well?

Why don't we talk about the approach to change that we take and an example of a change program that was never going to work because of a singular focus on getting the 'numbers' along with a key stakeholder in the change process who was only in it for what they could get out of it personally?

This was a medium sized company, an operational environment. Numbers had to be cut by 45%.

Why?

The business was over-resourced and operating in areas weren't core capability and that were losing money. There was an entitlement and a victim culture within the business that took a huge amount of time, effort and resources and, sucked away energy that could be used elsewhere.

The 45% number was decided by the Board, the CEO and the Leadership team.

This was going to be a challenge – the business had just gone through a major change and many people were either disengaged or not fully engaged already. There was no certainty about the future, there was fear about what 'could be' - absenteeism had increased, stress leave had increased, presenteeism was rife.

There was no plan to address the anticipated employee response to what was about to happen other than the standard communication plan.

The change was announced within the business without much thought. Everyone was on the back foot immediately.

Reactions ranged from shock, anger, fear, open conflict, threats of litigation and union intervention to acceptance-with-fear and those who just got on with it but with high expectations of how the change would be handled.

It was a tough time for managers who were impacted themselves and were either not skilled at having the appropriate conversations with their teams and/or not in the right headspace to do so.

Absenteeism, stress leave and presenteeism further increased – productivity waned despite the call for business as usual. There was distrust of management, bitterness toward the business owners and litigation was implemented by some.

What went wrong from a neuroscience perspective?

Social connection was severed – the sense of tribe had been shattered right from the top down. Threat had crept in around security, a meaningful future, loss of status and value. People felt they had been contributing to a purpose beyond just making money, but now they felt it was all about

cutting expenses and increasing revenue to look good to the Board and Shareholders. The Vision had lots its impact.

Predictability was gone – there was no certainty about the future.

Autonomy and sense of empowerment were gone - there was a perceived loss of control over destiny. There was no choice, no ability to decide next steps – “someone else had done that for me”.

Categorising – the brain needs to map information received to find patterns, relationships, and previous experiences in order to make sense of that information. Nothing made sense; some people hadn't been through this before so there was nothing to compare it to. “The information I'm getting doesn't fit my view of the world – it shouldn't be happening like this or at all.”

Equality – perceived unfairness drives strong negative emotions. “I've given this business everything and more for the last 10 years – it's not fair that I'm being impacted by this and 'two year tenure' “Bob isn't impacted at all, just because he has a critical skill they need going forward.”

This is the **BrainSPACE** model for change and engagement gone wrong.

BrainSPACE describes the brain's innate hard wiring. If any aspect of **SPACE** is absent, we can experience threat in the brain that manifests itself in a variety of ways which can negatively impact wellbeing, performance and productivity.

This sort of failed change experience can be avoided.

The subsequent engagement score one year later was lower than it had been before the change.

Whether it's one person impacted, a team or a whole organisation, planning and implementing change in alignment with the brain's natural tendencies, will substantially increase chances of success.

