



OBENG'S COLUMN

Development! What a monumental Waste-of-Time!

an article for you to pass to your HR person

It's 7.45 a.m. It's a bright and sunny morning but you're in a dark mood, a really dark mood, inconsolable. You've had to give away your tickets for the match today. Why? . . . Why, because you've got to join your colleagues on an alignment/ planning/ skills development/ team-building event.

You know it's going to be a waste of time. It always is. All this development - coaching - change your behaviour stuff never goes anywhere. It's just ' blah-blah,' hot air and guff. And you're missing a promising match for this.

A while ago HR decided to get round the problem using what they called ' one-to-one coaching.' Key people (you) were identified - labeled as 'talent' or 'high potentials' (immediately guaranteeing the jealousy and enmity of everyone else in the organisation and ensuring that you would never get any support or help with anything ever again) and assigned coaches. Yours was a great big, hairy bloke called Mike. Mike spent all the time you had with him trying to help you create 'meaningful outcomes in line with your values' while 'ensuring significant behaviour change.'

He claimed the coach didn't need to be better at playing the game than the person being coached, citing Tiger Woods and Kelly Holmes as examples. But since he knew nothing about your industry, or anything really about business management, let alone project management, and since you weren't a top athlete or even a top project manager with experience to build upon, there were many problems that couldn't be resolved. You didn't even know how to approach them; a bit like trying to jump to the moon without an understanding of gravity. It was great for your confidence - having a mate you could moan to on company time but all in all it was a disappointment.

So two years later you were back to alignment and training.

Why, oh why couldn't they teach you something that was relevant to your world? All the concepts they explained seemed to be from a bygone age when there was so little change in the organisation that you actually had the time to complete those complex frameworks (mostly re-hashes of ones you'd seen before).

And why did it all have to be so dry and boring? Interaction helped but . . . however much everyone said there would be, there was never any follow-up back at work. And even if there was, you instantly bumped into the processes and approaches that everyone else, who hadn't been 'developed', was familiar with and which had never been replaced or amended to support the new learning. And finally even if you actually did manage to change the processes, you'd find that your actions and behaviour were punished by your reward system, managed by HR, which rewarded last year's behaviour rather than next year's goals!

You ponder this for a while and then conclude: 'Well at least it's better than the way they used to introduce change at my previous organisation where a large sum of money would be spent on a new system or process which would than be steam-rollered out over everyone.' That didn't work either and left an even worse taste in the mouth and long lingering resentment.

Do you recognise any of this?

Any REAL change requires new learning, new ideas, new behaviours to be applied in practice. This journey to applied learning seems to be fraught with danger and it seems as if it is easy to lose your way. Over the past decade or so I have been carrying out an informal piece of research to understand the real barriers to transferring learning into real results in organisations.

At the start of almost every session I lead (courses, conferences, workshops audio-coaching etc.) I ask participants their Greatest Hopes & Fears for the session. I encourage them to be open and honest. Guess what they say?

Imagine you were just about to 'burn up' a day of your life in some development activity what would your greatest fears be? I probably work with about 10,000 participants per year. This article is built around the ever recurring fears.. I've developed a sort of top-of-the-pops which, in their

words not mine, are:

1. Not relevant - Just theory or consultant B.S. not aiming at the real problems we face
2. Can't or won't be allowed to apply this back at work
3. What we learn is the same old re-packaged rubbish which didn't work the last time round/actually makes things worse
4. Can't make new learning part of day-to-day work / Can't get others at work to go along with what we've learnt
5. Boring, death-by-Powerpoint, one-way conversation, no interaction, so we switch off and fall asleep



Are you surprised? I'm not. Their list is a very clear risk analysis of why change interventions don't work. You see, the journey from 0% change to 100% applied learning is a highly perilous one.

The most common mistake, which wouldn't show up in my research, is the Old World one of thinking that changing things changes people automatically. You set off on the downhill route, on the process side of the horizontal line.

I then get involved because the false dawn of progress is stalling and I'm asked to come and help out with an energising, motivational talk to reduce the fear or resistance to change which has built up in what has become an uphill battle.

'Well at least it's better than the way they used to introduce change at your previous organisation where a large sum of money would be spent on a new system or process which would than be steam-rollered out over everyone.'

The Old World way of implementing major change was to allocate a budget of funds for the change before considering the human side of change (if at all). A major computer system would be purchased – 600 e-learning licences would be purchased – aid would be put on planes before anyone had considered the suitability of the people impacted to accept, let alone absorb, the change. You take the journey from 0% change to 100% successfully completed, beginning by finding the Process/system based 'solution', and hoping the people will fall in line.

Consider the response to Hurricane Katrina – voting for millions of dollars for relief & reconstruction, while at the same time forcibly removing people from their homes, which they have themselves started to try to repair, without any real consultation or involvement; forced evacuation is simply decided centrally for 'your own good'.

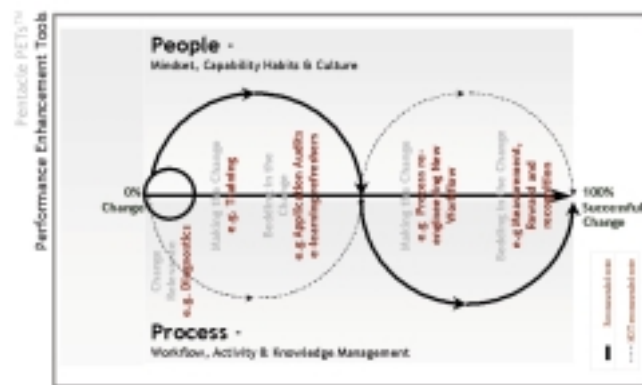
In Old World thinking there is a complete lack of understanding of the Third Law of Change¹. That People create change and People constrain change. Several tens of wasted billions later we realised we needed a better way².

For more sophisticated organisations over the past decade there has been an emphasis on people, buy-in, engagement training, behaviour change, leadership.



They begin by considering the human/People side of things; but given the persistent and plaintive pleas from the Hopes & Fears exercise there is something fundamentally wrong.

What is wrong in this case is that the journey to applied learning doesn't systematically deal with the five risks identified in the Hopes and Fears exercise.



'Why oh why couldn't they teach you something that was relevant to your world?' To achieve relevance, every learning activity must begin without a provocative focusing activity. It is very unlikely that the people doing the learning have 'dug up the drains' and unearthed the real blockages to be addressed. Often organisational politics or a lack of skills prevents this. Using anything from a HealthCheck to a BubbleDiagram as a diagnostic to really dig below the myriad of symptoms presented, allows us to focus on the minimum amount of change and learning required for the maximum real results. Another important outcome of this is to eliminate 'megaphone' change management where everyone, not just the Stakeholders, hear and are disoriented by the impending change. Focusing ensures that the absolute minimum number of people are involved and managed through the change.

We call this process of forcing focus and new concepts Provoking. *And why did it all have to be so dry and boring? Interaction helped but...*

It is crucial that the person leading the learning demonstrates that he or she at least tries to practise what he preaches. Any evidence that they themselves have used a tool, technique or behaviour, instantly makes it come alive with possibilities. There is a need to move beyond the Old World case study approach to examples by storytelling and analogy.

We call this process of opening people's minds to the possibilities Inspiring. *'All the concepts they explained seemed to be from a bygone age when there was so little change in the organisation that you did have time to complete those complex frameworks, mostly re-hashes of ones you'd seen before.'*

The content must be appropriate, for example any model which takes significantly longer to teach than to apply, will probably never get used in anger. The maxim must be: 'the more complex the situation the simpler the solution must be'. There is also a real need for frameworks and concepts to fully embrace the fact that, as every leading thinker will tell you, we really have moved from a linear Newtonian business-scape to a complex and chaotic one on a global scale.

This makes obsolete most frameworks, which date back much more than a decade. At Pentacle we created a New World Curriculum to solve this problem. For example, you will be familiar how in project management we teach how to manage all types of project from fully definable and defined 'painting by numbers' to densely 'foggy', providing proven tools and also the

best practical ways to tackle them.

Look at the sell-by-date on any tools, techniques and behaviour you are encouraging your people to follow, and actively look out for New World tools and concepts – they are easy to spot since they usually follow the 12 rules³. We call this process of providing effective new world tools, behaviours and frameworks Educating.

However much everyone said there would be, there was never any follow up back at work.

Use 'nice spam emails' audio conferences, shared web spaces, internal lunchtime drumbeat meetings and buddying to encourage people to keep the flame alight in the workplace. It is crucial to build the coaching on the back of New World education. We find coaching works best when it connects with new insights, stimuli and ways of looking at the world. In Einstein's words 'A problem cannot be solved by the consciousness that created it.'

We call this process of coaching and embedding learning in the workplace Facilitating.

And even if there was, you instantly bumped the processes and approaches everyone was familiar with - which were never replaced or amended to support the new learning

Churchill once said, 'First we shape our buildings, thereafter they shape us.' It is really important to remove old processes however much loved they are and however efficiently they are applied and integrated with MIS. At Pentacle we build collaborative tools quickly which support the introduction of new working processes (see JigSaw for Project Management⁴). You need to do something similar. The most important feature of such a tool is the need to provide contextual help, definitions and explanations within the tool itself to de-mystify the process for anyone who hasn't been 'developed'.

We call this process of providing processes for real work which support and embed the new learning Enabling.

And finally even if you actually did manage to change the processes your actions and behaviour were punished by your reward system, managed by HR, which rewarded last year's behaviour rather than next year's goals!

This bit is up to you – sorry I can't help here.

The good news is it is possible to journey successfully from 0% to applied learning. The bad news is if you set off in the wrong direction or miss out any



of the key steps it is a complete waste of time, money and emotion.

If you want people to learn new things, apply them and get real results and change their own lives for the better you need to plan the whole journey, not just the training or tools or behaviours.

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³Third Law of Change: People create change – people constrain change!
 People constrain change (see Sokolov 1966) any externally imposed surprise results in a response which is primarily emotional – people become cunning in resisting a change they fear. People create change (see Obeng 1994) any internally invented change through creativity is an opportunity for gain – People become interested in pursuing the change to reach the outcome
⁴see <http://PentacleTheVBS.com/PETs.htm>
⁵see <http://PentacleTheVBS.com/NewRules.htm>
⁶see <http://PentacleTheVBS.com/JigSaw.htm>