

Call for Papers

Journal of Change Management

Special Issue: Why Does Change Fail and What Can We Do About It?

Guest Editor: Professor Bernard Burnes, Manchester Business School

A recent global survey by McKinsey & Company (2008) concluded that only by changing constantly could organisations hope to survive. There is nothing remarkable in this finding; it echoes what most writers and commentators have been saying for the past two decades (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Kotter, 1996; Kanter *et al*, 1992; Stacey, 2007). However, the McKinsey survey also found that some two-thirds of all change initiatives failed. Whilst this seems to be a staggeringly high rate of failure, it is not out of line with the rest of the change literature which regularly quotes failure rates of between 60% and 90% (Burnes, 2009). For example, Bain and Co claim the general failure rate is 70% (Senturia *et al*, 2008) but that it rises to 90% for culture change initiatives (Rogers *et al*, 2006). In a survey of the change literature, Smith (2002 & 2003) found a similar failure rate. Nor does this level of failure appear to be new. In the 1990s, Hammer and Champy (1993) claimed that 70% of all BPR initiatives failed. In the 1980s, the failure rate for the introduction of computer-based technologies was estimated at around 60% (AT Kearney, 1989; Bessant and Haywood, 1985) and in the 1970s, Crosby (1979) claimed that 90% of quality improvement initiatives failed.

It appears, therefore, that for the last forty years at least, far more change initiatives have failed than have succeeded. However, how reliable and representative are these figures? Whilst some studies are clearly based on extensive literature reviews which identify the failure rates of different types of change (e.g. Smith, 2002 & 2003), others provide little information as to the data on which they are based or the types of change involved (e.g. the surveys by Bain and Co (Rogers *et al*, 2006; Senturia *et al*, 2008) and McKinsey & Company, 2008). Therefore, an investigation as to the validity and nature of the various estimates of change failure is long overdue. Alongside this sits the issue of why so many change initiatives appear to fail. Is it that most types of change are just so complex that most organisational change initiatives are inevitably doomed to failure? Are there some types of change or some types of organisations which experience more failure than others? Finally, and most importantly, how can organisations improve their chances of achieving successful change?

Consequently, there are three areas which this special issue seeks to address:

1. How reliable are the data on change failure? Does the data show whether or not some types of change and organisations more prone to failure than others?
2. Why does change fail? Is each change failure due to the unique circumstances in which it is undertaken or are there common causes?
3. What can organisations do to improve their success rate? Are some approaches more successful than others? Should and can organisations undertake less change?

Refereeing Process

In the first instance, a short Abstract should be submitted to the Guest Editor (details below). Following approval of the Abstract, authors should submit their paper via ScholarOne Manuscripts (<http://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/rjcm>).

Refereeing and the selection of papers will be carried out according to the Journal's normal procedures (double-blind review). Submitted papers (5000-7000 words) should not have been previously published nor be currently under consideration for publication elsewhere.

Timescale

Date for Abstract submission:	August 31 st 2010
Decision from Guest Editor:	September 30 th 2010
Final date for submission of papers:	February 28 th 2011

Guest Editor

Professor Bernard Burnes
Chair of Organisational Change
Manchester Business School
University of Manchester
Booth Street West
Manchester
M15 6PB
UK

E-mail bernard.burnes@mbs.ac.uk

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