

## Setting out my stall – Ian Adkins

This training programme has been created for practitioners like you to help you as a business leader, change manager, internal communicator, HR professional or consultant to see a different and, I think, better way to design and deliver corporate culture change. I too am a practitioner of change and not a researcher or academic. I have seen a series of ideas that really seem to work, especially in combination, and want to share these insights with a community of like-minded people.

Nothing in this programme is radically new or revolutionary on its own however as a combination is still uncommon, especially in larger, more traditional organizations. Every element exists out there in the public domain and I have attempted to reference those sources for you. What this programme is designed to be is a combination of ideas and approaches that when used together create a powerful and innovative way of engaging people from across an organization to design and deliver corporate culture change whether that is a wholesale change of direction or a more focused change of behaviours in support of a new system, way of working or performance improvement.

Don't be fooled though. This is not an easy road nor a super-fast way of executing change. We are talking about people, but the approach described here works and creates lasting results. It is also about control: about who leads this change.

It is about taking back control from the big consultancies and training companies, that 'do' change 'to' organizations. It is about allowing employees to create change in a natural, organic, internally-led manner and one that creates energy, activism and a sense of ownership. Fundamentally it is about an approach that really works unlike 80% of culture change initiatives.

This programme is also designed, like the rules that it puts forward, to serve as a catalyst for action and debate. My fervent hope is that a global community of business leaders and change practitioners will gather around this approach and will help to contribute to making this approach fuller and more comprehensive as well as more useful in future iterations. Hopefully we can form our own community of activist-practitioners who are looking for a different, and better, way of leading people-change.

# Introduction

## Foundations for leading change

I am sure that you can remember your first day at work in your first job after school or university. Most of us were wide eyed, a little anxious and desperately keen to make a good impression. It was probably a somewhat daunting experience.

A little over 30 years ago I arrived at the Royal Military Academy Sandhurst, the home of officer training for the British Army, having graduated from university a few months earlier. I had looked forward to that day with excitement and trepidation for a long time. The first day was an extended series of dull administrative sessions: form filling, briefings and medical and dental inspections.

Day 2 was altogether different. It started with our first drill session taken by our platoon colour sergeant. He was very loud and, for reasons I did not understand at the time, he seemed very angry. He shouted at us and our shambolic attempts to march. A few hours later, we were laden with bags of new kit having been to the quartermaster's stores and were trying to march the mile or so back to our accommodation carrying it all. My arms ached, my hands burned from the hard, new straps on my kitbags, and my brain tried to make sense of this sudden shock to the system. I, and my new colleagues, just got on with it though. That afternoon, we met our new platoon commander, a soft spoken, pleasant officer with a ready smile and an assured professional air about him. He was what we all aspired to be and found ourselves watching him and learning much from him.

What we also noticed was how close our platoon commander and platoon sergeant were and the mutual respect that they had for each other. Even though one was a well-educated and socially polished officer and the other a hardened, tough NCO and veteran of the Falklands War.

That evening we were given tasks for getting some kit ready for the following day and were left to it. We rallied around and helped each other, especially those of us with some previous military experience. Bonds were established quickly and leaders within our midst became obvious as they helped others and calmed nerves. They too became role models for those with less experience.

Your first few days in your first permanent job might be more or less deeply ingrained in your memory but think back to what you were learning. You probably had an induction or orientation period whether days, weeks or months long. You would have been told all about your organization's rules, procedures and policies. You would have had your job role explained and perhaps some training or preparation specific to that.

So much of what you learned though was not written down in a manual or policy booklet. You picked it up from what the people around you said and did. A common example of what is not written down but which forms an integral part of the working day is what you do for lunch. Do you bring sandwiches, go to the staff canteen, or the café over the road? Do you eat with colleagues or on your own? Typically, we look around us, watch what others do and follow their lead. If there are several patterns of behaviour then we look to someone a bit like us but more experienced, or to our new team leader, and simply do what they do.

When you started that new job what you were doing in those first few days was absorbing the prevailing corporate culture. You learnt quickly and much of what you learnt about how to act, how to work and how to interact with colleagues was simply picked up by observation and copying. You kept your eyes and ears open and followed the lead of others, as I did at Sandhurst.

In the British Army, the relationship between a junior officer and his platoon sergeant is one of the most complex but also (when it works well) one of the most incredibly powerful leadership relationships. The young officer is in charge of the platoon by rank and by appointment, but his or her deputy is someone with 5, 10 or more years' extra professional as well as life experience. The junior officer is well advised to listen and learn whilst also trying to appear authoritative, confident and in control. This is a complex professional and personal relationship and one that cannot be learnt purely from a book or in a classroom. Observing it in action is key and emulating successful examples is vital. Indeed, so much of what we do throughout our professional lives is absorbed like this.

## Why was TransACT™ created?

Given this grounding that we all have in observing our colleagues' behaviours, imitating them and learning from those closest to us, then it is amazing that we seem to adopt very different approaches as we become more senior and begin to lead organizational change ourselves.

In my military career, both regular and reserve, I worked my way up to leading a battalion of over 300 people and have held several staff jobs, four of them at Ministry of Defence or Army HQ level. There I saw many corporate change initiatives and as a consultant over many years I have been part of numerous change programmes. They have varied in nature from process changes, technology change, strategy development, strategic planning and in more recent years to culture change. What has struck me is how focused we all become on structures, procedures and processes and how confident we are that these will deliver tangible and meaningful change. Especially when led or organized by us.

Yet time and again, that 3 or 6-month change project that was going to revolutionize how we worked and the environment in which we worked, extends out to 12 or 24 months and results seem slow to materialize. When we look at what is happening around us, we realize with horror and resignation that not a lot has really changed. People are working and interacting in more or less the same way; the place still has a similar feel; and things are perhaps only marginally better than they were 2 years previously. Has that happened to you? Have you see this?

I worked for one large corporate client some years ago on a safety culture project. They had dozens of similar projects running concurrently, all over the place. They were utterly fixated on reorganising themselves; creating new forms; new procedures; new job roles; and communication campaigns that used ever more elaborate emails, glossier and better produced magazines and posters, video campaigns, and even touring actors simulating common risk scenarios. I got involved both at the strategic end and then later at the operational end with front-line leaders.

I really felt sorry for those guys. They were inundated with safety talks, training courses, management briefings, executive visits and then workshops with consultants like me. I tried hard to make my two days with them as experiential and meaningful as I could but it was hopeless really. I felt demoralised and began to search for a better way to deliver corporate culture change that both delivered on the executive level aspiration whether that was safety, customer centricity, agility or innovation but also crucially, something that actually gave front line staff something tangible that they could *do* differently. Appealing to them logically and emotionally can be quite successful in getting people to buy-in to a new approach, but if they still don't have the concrete behaviours or actions to take, little or nothing will really change on a day to day level.

The people I met on that project had heard it all before. I know because they told me! They were hard-pressed people who didn't need to hear the messages again but just in a different format. They wanted to know the answer to the question: "what can I *do* differently in my job tomorrow to make this all work?". They didn't need fluffy words and feelings. They wanted something tangible, practical and actionable. Something they could understand and take away. Something they felt comfortable to do themselves. Their words to me were direct, forthright and hard-hitting. They made a real impact on me.

## TransACT™ - A manifesto for change

So, began my journey and what follows is the results of what I have discovered over many years from reading, courses that I have attended, results from client work as well as working at the feet of masters in the field and talking to lots of other practitioners too. I reiterate that every element is out there somewhere, and used in

combination by some, but in my experience, is little understood nor used in large scale corporate change projects.

You may ask why this is. In part, it is probably down to some of my colleagues in the large consultancies or training houses which have a vested interest in selling large scale consultant- or trainer-led solutions. However, as we have seen simply 'sheep-dipping' everyone through an engagement workshop or extensive communications campaign, whilst appealing in its simplicity, does not generally work. Nothing much really changes. We are all so busy it is always easy to call in the outside experts to 'do' change to us. But it doesn't deliver long term sustainable behavioural change by and large.

So, what follows is not a quick cure but is something that can produce deep, lasting and sustainable results with changes observable within months. It needs to be structured and staffed with the right people, probably with a bit of outside expert help, but above all it relies on the sort of insights outlined in the first couple of pages of this chapter. It is also informed by recent research results from an array of fields including cognitive psychology, neuroscience, behavioural economics and political science amongst others.