What helps or hinders managers in delivering change in integrated projects

Phillip Lunts
Aims of session

1. outline the reasons for looking at this topic

2. detail the findings

3. explore the implications of using findings in practice
“Only mediocre people are always at their best “

W. Somerset Maugham
Middle Managers

• seen as blocks to change (eg collaboratives) (Huy, 2002; Hewison, 2006)
• divorced from strategy - lack bigger picture (Currie, 1999, Carney, 2006)
• poor understanding of project owner concept

“reluctant but resourceful”  Currie, 2006
70% of Smaller Projects Fail

Project now in possible jeopardy

How to Save a Failing Project Chaos to Control

Pay-for-Deliverables Project Failure Rate (by size)
HOW’S YOUR PROJECT COMING ALONG?

IT’S A STEAMING PILE OF FAILURE.

IT’S LIKE FIFTEEN DRUNKEN MONKEYS WITH A JIGSAW PUZZLE.

HOW’S YOUR PROJECT COMING ALONG?

FINE.
Choosing the subject

Project Management

- bad name
- methodology not properly followed (Kerzner, 2008)
- doesn’t fit with reality (Cicmil and Hodgson, 2006)
- over-bureaucratic (Shifilacqua et al, 2009)
- Manipulation from above (Hodgson, 2002)

enthusiasm → disillusionment → total confusion → search for the guilty → punishment of the innocent → promotion of non-participants

Choosing the subject

Understanding the human dimensions of change

– transitions (Bridges 2004)
– stakeholder analysis
– ‘selling the vision” (Rouleau, 2005; Currie, 1999)
– self-awareness
– how mental models inhibit action (Senge, 1999)
– fear of failure (skilled incompetence - Argyris, 1986)
Choosing the subject

• integration
  – governance (Attwood et al, 2003)
  – infrastructure (Macadam, 2008)
  – organisational priorities (commitment to integration) (Peck, Towell & Gulliver, 2001)
  – cultures
    • between organisations (Hiscock & Pearson, 1999)
    • within organisations (Ham et al, 2008)
    • between managers and practitioners (Peck & Crawford, 2004)

“your integration is my fragmentation” Leutz, 1999
Process

• Little on middle managers and integration
• Literature review - cumulative
  • project mgt - but mostly theory, not about actuality
  • middle managers - but quite old (1990s)
  • how people behave around change (but vast...!)
  • integration - lots (but changing constantly)
• Focused on immediate experience - led me to Project C...
Project C

- Nationally-funded locality-based project to develop integrated teams
- Involved managers I was close to (but didn’t manage)
- Had got bad press - seen as ‘lost it’s way’
- High profile

“Black swan” theory (Popper, quoted in Flyvbjerg, 2001) - one atypical phenomenon disproves general theory
Methodology

• Qualitative - “the main strength of qualitative research is its ability to study phenomena that are simply unavailable elsewhere” (Silverman, 2006 p43)

Semi-structured interviews;

• closeness to interviewees appeared to help - easier access, knew right people, knew questions to ask

• Process - everyone seemed to appreciate it!

• Fascinating and a real honour - spend 1 hour listening to colleague talking about their own perceptions of things - get under their skin
Findings 1

• Change Management is core to the role of the middle manager

• Middle Managers understand
  – project management methodology - seen as bureaucratic but necessary
  – how to make people change -
    • know what needs to be done to get people on board
    • built on experience

after all, that is the role of middle managers!

“one way of conceptualizing the work of middle managers in health care is to characterize it as a means of resolving conflict” Hewison, 2003
Findings (2)

• differences in culture did not seem to be highly significant but...
  – research did not look at front-line staff
  – middle managers in health and social work have similar cultures
  – flaw in research or analysis
Findings (3)

Biggest challenges for middle managers

• time and capacity -
  – seen as preventing them from undertaking projects effectively
  – real issue is focus - “to clear your desk of other things”
  – can’t balance range of work items and carry out focused and intense work (Gonzalez & Mark, 2004)
Findings (4)

- accountability
  - searching for direction and senior leadership
  - ‘hero’ leadership style (but is it really there?)
  - normative approach to project management
  - mental models incapacitate (groupthink) (Senge, 1999)
Findings (5)

• networks
  – felt project started moving when people got together
  – informal networks shown to be good way to introduce innovation (Sugarman, 2010)

Informal networks develop where bureaucracy fails to support organisations and people (Stacey, 2000)
Findings (6)

• narrative
  – felt very passionate about integrated working
  – well aware of failings in project to date
  – developing a shared story about what project is
    • to explain their role in project
    • to support them to move project forward

organisations are constructed worlds - “when people get together, they make things up” Bate, 1994
Conclusions

Change Management

• Middle Managers do understand how to manage projects and people

• They are not in a position to bring the necessary focus to undertake effective projects

• They may work under a mental model of ‘hero’ (directive) leadership
Conclusions

Integration

- Accountability is a big issue for middle managers in integration projects

- Complexity of working across organisations causes inertia and lack of ownership

- Informal networks, built on trust and respect, may enable managers to move integration projects forward = collective or dispersed leadership
Working on the edge of chaos
(from Stacey)

You are here!
What middle managers need...

- Standard approach to project mgt - and change mgt
- Ability to be released to deliver change
- Understanding of complexity theory - can’t predict what will happen
- Leadership Development - to recognise when and how to lead (collective/dispersed leadership)
- Support for positive risktaking (embrace failure!)

*I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work.*
—Thomas Edison
What does that mean in practice?

What I have done (tried to do)

1. Impose standardised project mgt approach (Programme Mgt Office)
2. Standardised Improvement Skills Training
3. Funding to release middle managers to undertake projects (but not cracked the backfill issue)
4. Empower middle managers to work across boundaries
5. Practical and directed Leadership Development Programme (incorporating complexity!)
6. Foster networks
“Those that are knowledgeable in traditional project management discourse may not value the virtuoso political and social skills necessary to be successful in the complicated and messy real world of projects” (Cicmil et al, 2006)
“Only mediocre people are always at their best “

W. Somerset Maugham