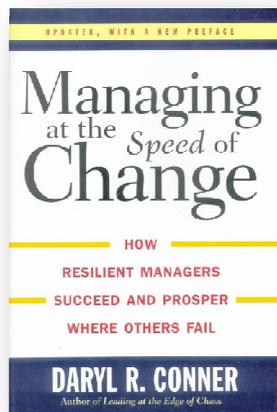


Managing at the Speed of Change, by Daryl R Conner

A Book Review by Ian Jay

A problem that can arise in a project is users' not taking advantage of the changed situation. When asked to make the transition there are excuses or avoidance of the issue. This dysfunctional behaviour can arise from too much change in the lives of the change targets. The problem it represents is poor returns for the organisation on its investment in the project.

The situation described above arises when people are exposed to more change than they can cope with. Change comes from three sources; the broader environment, the organisation, and personal life. The impact of change in any of these three areas adds to a total change tolerance beyond which the individual cannot cope. Once the change threshold is reached people start showing undesirable behaviour. For instance valued staff may leave or find reasons to avoid working on the project.



In these situations what has happened is that the person has reached a limit. Their resilience to change events has been exceeded, they can no longer cope. The situation is a result of all the change that person has experienced, not only changes from the project. Many of the larger change elements are micro events in a person's private life, but these all add to the workplace problem. The situation is a result of a person no longer feeling in control of what is happening around them. They are no longer able to adsorb more change to their lives.

Globally the pace of change is increasing, within organisations the number of projects is also growing. The cumulative affect is that people will be exposed to greater amounts of change all the time. Their ability to adsorb change and their resilience to it needs to be improved. That is the key theme of this author.

The solution put forward in the book is to limit the amount of change so that it remains within the tolerance levels of employees. This means that only critical changes are made and other change is avoided. In short, if change is needed to ensure the survival of the firm then it should be made, other change should be shelved. The change process itself also has to be actively managed so that the change targets improve their resilience and are better able to cope with the planned change, and future changes they may face. By following this approach, the overall ability of the organisation to cope with change increases. Future changes of greater size can then be undertaken.

The book describes some of the structural issues impacting on success with change. One issue is the relation between the change sponsor and target, of specific interest is a triangular structure. In this situation the target may report to the sponsor of change but the change agent is a peer. In this situation the agent asks the target to make changes and is ignored, the direction needs to come directly from the sponsor or be strongly endorsed by the sponsor. In most cases this situation results in a failed change. The author mentions a number of such situations and advises on ways to deal with them.

Firms that succeed are better able to manage the next change they face. The leaders of these firms use change as a strategic tool to control and manage the future. A set of seven distinct patterns are identified that support the resilience pattern that forms the core of such organisations. These patterns are discussed in some detail in the book and their development is the main subject and value it offers.

A key aspect that permeates the book is the individual nature of change. It affects each person as a separate event. This is brought home when the way people react to a change they see as negative is described. This cycle was first identified by psychologists dealing with bereavement. It was expanded on by the author from a five to a seven stage model based on his own observations. In this model people are first immobilised and then denial before reacting with anger and have to be managed through the rest of the cycle to a point of accepting the change. When completion of the change cycle is not achieved dysfunctional behaviour arises.

Once the pattern of change has been mastered the role of the manager changes to one of developing resilience to change in subordinates and peers. As the author says; 'by approaching change in a disciplined manner, we can become architects of our future'.

The author is a clinical psychologist by training, and has worked with organisation change projects for thirty years. The book is based on his experience, and its content forms the foundations of change management.

'Managing at the Speed of Change, how Resilient Managers Succeed and Prosper where others Fail' by Daryl R Conner. Published by Random House 2006 ISBN 0679406840

Published in the September / October 2007 Edition of ProjectNet Magazine.

©This Book Review cannot be reproduced in any form without the written permission of the relevant authority at the original publisher, ProjectNet Magazine. Contact the Editor at info@projectnet.co.za.