

Session 6

ACHIEVING TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE – BIG BANG? OR INCREMENTAL PROGRESSION?

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Achieving organisational change – and making it stick - is hard. Research shows that between 50% & 70% of change efforts fail - fully or partly. Achieving change in universities is especially hard. This presentation will argue that – especially in universities – significant, lasting and ultimately transformational organisational change comes out of a process of long term incremental and iterative progression. This is in contrast to the “big bang”, management led/forced approach which characterises many of the prescriptions for change which appear in the literature of change management.

Discussion will consider several analyses of change dynamics: that of Jonathan Haidt and in particular his “Elephant and Rider” metaphor for organisational change; Robert Doppelt’s “Wheel of Change” concept, and; John Kotter’s widely known “8 step” model for achieving transformational change. Discussion of these three models will focus on the differences in the way in which each model conceives the nature of change and the prescriptions that they put forward for achieving transformational change.

These theoretical discussions of the dynamics of change will be considered against the empirical experience of administrative change in higher education, in particular the influence of organizational culture on work to achieve change. The experience of two universities will be considered: La Trobe University where a broad and wide ranging program of organisational reform has been underway since 2007 - and Yale University which has carried out two administrative change initiatives over several years.

The presentation will argue that no one approach to change is right in all circumstances. However, the organisational nature of universities is such that an incremental and iterative approach may be the most effective in the long run – rather than a “big bang” approach to transformative change. That incremental approach – because it is a long haul – does have risks and pitfalls. The presentation will discuss what some of these risks may be – and how they might be countered and best managed.

This proposal for a presentation is submitted in collaboration with the submission from Peter Barton – Director of the Review of Student Administration and Student Services at La Trobe University. While the two submissions/presentations stand alone they are intended to form a complimentary pair. This presentation will focus on the broad dynamics of achieving change in higher education - with particular reference to the empirical evidence and experiences of at La Trobe University and Yale University. Peter Barton’s proposed presentation will concentrate on one major aspect of the changes underway at La Trobe – the reshaping of the student administration and student services portfolio.

Presenters Biography

Ian Smith is Manager of the Administrative Change Program, a large scale organisational change program at La Trobe University.

His work in the Australian higher education sector has encompassed work in change management, human resources and library & information services.

Ian has a particular interest in staff development & workplace learning and organisational change & development. These interests are reflected in Ian's postgraduate studies in public policy and human resource management.