

# A tool to change the world?

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**Peter Duignan explains how surveyors have a major role in change management to safeguard the future of our planet**

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Change management can be a dry subject when discussed in an academic way. But it comes alive when applied to the real issues confronting countries, businesses and professional organisations.

Archimedes said: 'Give me a lever long enough and a fulcrum on which to place it and I will move the world.' The principles of change management provide us with a powerful tool to do so.

*Change management goes hand in hand with the struggle for a sustainable planet*

Change management in fact owes its existence to grief studies; a correlation was identified between change and grieving, particularly when employees had lost their jobs. Early research in change management also showed dissatisfaction with failures resulting from changes that were seen as being top-down.

One early model of change management was Lewin's unfreeze?change?refreeze theory. This looks at how to destabilise organisational inertia by unlocking existing behaviours, and then moving to a new level of performance that adjusts the attitudes, beliefs and structures that shape behaviour, the 'change' part of the model. 'Refreezing' then involves reinforcing new behaviours to maintain higher levels of performance.

Change management pioneer John Kotter detailed an 8-step process to achieve successful change:

1. create a sense of urgency;
2. build a guiding coalition;
3. devise a strategic vision and initiatives;
4. enlist a volunteer army;
5. enable action by removing any barriers;
6. generate short-term wins;
7. sustain acceleration; and
8. institute change.

## Urgency and readiness

The recent [COP21 Climate Change Conference](#) in Paris produced a historic agreement,

signed by 195 nations, 'to combat climate change and unleash actions and investment towards a low-carbon, resilient and sustainable future'. While thinking about how to frame this article, I was struck by how the outcomes from COP21 could be implemented on a global scale. Following Kotter's yardstick, we are already on the road to a solution. We have the first elements in place ? urgency and a readiness to change. We may even have the bones of a guiding coalition.

In 2006, Kotter co-wrote *Our iceberg is melting*, a book about penguins battling to change as their home melted that expressed his thoughts on the fear of change, and how to motivate people to face the future and take action. It shows the way that change management goes hand in hand with the struggle for a sustainable planet.

While politicians were ecstatic about reaching agreement at the Paris summit, environmental campaigners, academics and sceptics were less impressed by the goals, but accepted that they represented a positive first step. The US Secretary of State John Kerry said the agreement was not perfect but praised it as a 'critical step forwards'.

Yet while all parties had agreed that there was an urgent need for change, this came with a caveat from many: it was going to have to come from the bottom up if this giant change management programme was going to be successful.

With surveyors involved in every aspect of moulding our environment ? from financial analysis and construction to mining and agriculture ? our fate is inextricably linked with this huge undertaking.

The COP21 targets will trigger change on a scale that surveyors cannot ignore. But how should we manage change in our profession to respond to the greatest crisis faced by humankind?

## **Vision and communication**

We now have a worldwide constituency waiting for action, and it is incumbent on all major players to articulate a vision and communicate it to that constituency.

*We must persuade the government that its policies should be consistent with COP21's targets*

The RICS' greatest strength is that its international multi-disciplinary membership is involved in all aspects of the built environment. We are therefore major players in the changes needed to safeguard our future.

We have to be visionary leaders if we are to perform this role. We must persuade our members of their crucial part in providing a solution; the environment must be at the forefront of all our actions. We must also persuade our clients that environmental awareness and action make good sense.

It is difficult to argue against eliminating waste, reducing energy bills and protecting

property from flooding and other environmental catastrophes. But we must also persuade the government that its built environment policies should be consistent with the objectives, recommendations and targets that emerged from COP21.

RICS' multi-disciplinary membership must prove, at every stage of the project lifecycle, that an environmentally friendly approach will pay dividends for our clients and for the earth itself. Our general practice and quantity surveyors will perhaps place emphasis on lifecycle costs. Our project management and building surveyors will rise to the challenge of implementing environmentally friendly construction methods and influencing the manufacture of low-carbon building materials. Our facilities management surveyors will seek to run buildings with minimal carbon footprints.

We pride ourselves on our communication and engagement with all parties in the built environment sector. Having adopted a vision, then, it will be necessary to communicate it so that our members, clients and government are in no doubt about our resolve.

## **Empowerment and short-term wins**

A well-articulated vision can inspire and empower our members, who must become environmental champions. Training will play a key part in achieving this.

This training must include analysis as well as the practical aspects of surveying. As planning regulations increasingly focus on sustainability, so critical analysis of all projects and the environmental benefits they yield will be necessary if they are to be allowed to proceed. CPD will ensure that our members keep up to date with best practice and reinforce the message that sustainability is at the centre of our profession.

While there is little we can do to remedy past mistakes, we can enable short-term wins with our future actions. For example, state-of-the-art building services combined with rigorous insulation standards and low-carbon building materials can result in impressive performances. We must challenge our clients to adopt these approaches while developing the tools to demonstrate to them that such measures make sense in all areas, including cost.

Recycling is another important component of environmental policies that can offer considerable short-term gains. Recycling facilities can be provided in buildings, while buildings themselves – that is, all the materials used in their construction – should ultimately be recyclable. Landfill will soon become hugely expensive so it is important to prepare alternatives to this method of disposal.

## **Consolidating and generating further change**

Once these easy gains have been made, the real work will begin. Whatever changes we can generate from now on will be dwarfed by the challenges that the existing built environment poses.

*We have to be visionary leaders*

The COP21 target is very exacting: limiting global warming to an increase of less than 2°C at an estimated cost of US\$16.5 trillion. The goal is effectively to eliminate carbon emissions in the second half of this century.

Retrofitting our buildings for better environmental performance will require skills from across the surveying disciplines and beyond. How will we persuade people to upgrade their homes, which are responsible for an enormous amount of carbon emissions? How will we stop the use of fossil fuels to heat old housing stock?

It is likely that incentives will be required to generate this type of bottom-up change. What form will these take? What carrots and sticks will they use? Will the oil-fired boiler go the way of the filament lamp?

Our historic building stock will present particular problems if people are to continue to use it. Will it be possible to retain regulatory exemptions for our listed buildings, for instance?

There will also be a significant impact on our agricultural sector, with attention focusing on the emissions generated by animal husbandry, while in land management increased afforestation will help reduce the carbon in our atmosphere. All of these issues fall in the remit of chartered surveyors.

Trying to change the world is clearly a much larger undertaking than restructuring companies and organisations. As both COP21 and change management gurus point out, change must be delivered from the bottom up: the role of the RICS must be to lead its members and inspire and facilitate that change.

The urgency for change has been identified and world leaders have set goals and targets. So what are we waiting for? It is time for chartered surveyors to look at how they can adapt to the new reality in their daily practices. Change management is a powerful tool to help us succeed.

**Peter Duignan MRICS MSCSI is Capital Projects Consultant at [Bank of Ireland Group Property](#)**

### **Further information**

- Related competencies include [Sustainability](#) and [Construction technology and environmental services](#)
- This feature is taken from the RICS *Construction journal* (April/May 2016)