

industrial products outlook

The real business of people





Australian industrial products companies continue to be challenged by the global marketplace and must continue to step up to the mark. In earlier chapters we looked at the need to invest in information technology and engage in offshore sourcing as part of global supply chains. Here we consider a virtually untapped asset that can maximise the potential of these new ways of operation: people.

People are a vital element of how a company performs globally and competes with the best the world has to offer.

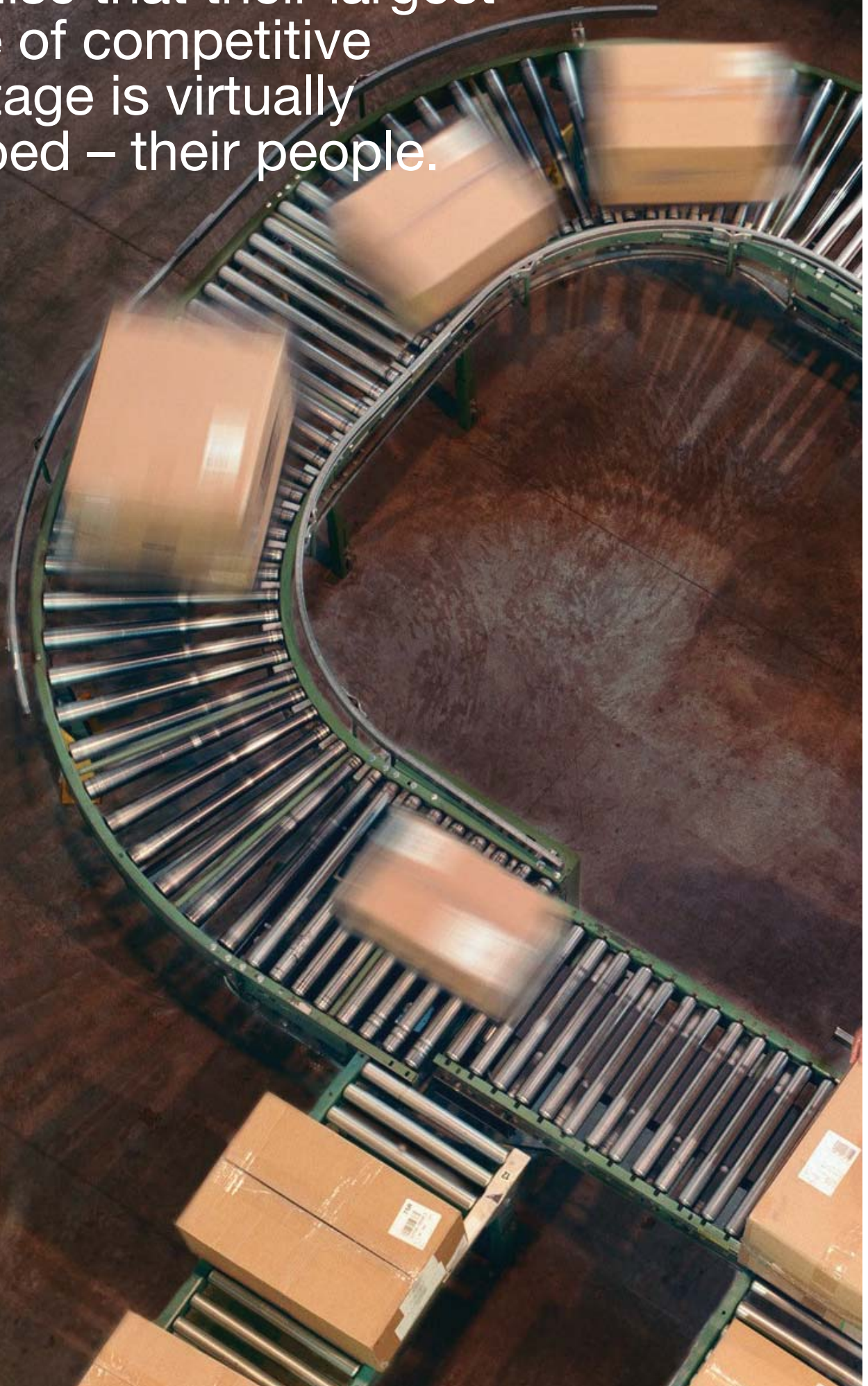
Now as never before, a company's labour force will have a direct impact on how it performs. The task of middle and senior management is to see that the company's people have the tools and motivation to perform as required. Industrial products companies must continually review the quality and skills of their workforce and management to ensure they are world standard.

Corporate culture is fundamental in building the right skills at all levels in the organisation as it seeks to drive change. If the culture is one of passion, where people are motivated and enthusiastic, change will be executed more successfully, enabling the organisation to better match its rivals on the world stage.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'G. Billings'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Graeme Billings
Industrial Products Leader
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June 2007

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The real business of people

Australian industrial products companies are under increasing pressure to improve their performance and productivity in order to survive.

Traditional tactics such as enhancing technology, re-engineering supply chains and outsourcing have fast become standard rather than a point of difference. Companies are beginning to recognise that their largest source of competitive advantage is virtually untapped – their people.

Too often, companies suffer from ineffective management, inadequate staffing and a failure to engage employees in the process of change. Productivity can be crippled by a failure to attract and retain enough of the right people, or having a workforce that is not engaged and aligned to working towards the company's goals.

The concept of employees being a source of competitive advantage is not new, but industrial products companies that are able to fully realise the potential of their people are still in the minority. Many companies are held back by a mindset that seeks to drive productivity solely through advances in technology and process improvement. Companies that rely on these avenues alone will struggle.

In future, sustainable success will be possible only by hiring and retaining the right employees and engaging them in today's constant cycle of workplace change.

The Outlook

- Attracting and retaining competent staff will become more difficult as the talent pool dwindles and companies begin to feel the effects of the worst labour shortage of our lifetime.
- Market analysts will sharpen their focus on intangibles such as employee engagement and leadership capabilities when assessing and predicting organisational performance.
- Restructuring, downsizing and changes to industrial relations will continue to erode employee loyalty.
- The balance of workplace power will continue to shift from employer to employee. Companies that fail to recognise, reward and develop staff will see an increasing number leave in search of more suitable employment.
- Quality leaders will become more difficult to attract, develop and retain.
- Generational congestion will develop as diverse age groups work together. Companies that cannot adapt their work environment and management styles accordingly will not be able to retain quality staff.
- Progressive companies are beginning to quantify the returns on their investment in people. Those that do not align their people and business strategies will be left behind.

The need for skills

The obvious but often forgotten prerequisite of investing wisely in your people is not just having enough people, but having the right type of people who have the capability and the motivation to drive competitive performance.

The shortage of skills in Australian manufacturing has become a serious issue at all levels of the workforce, from the factory floor to the executive suite. Executives require the skills to identify the key issues and opportunities in competing on the global stage and leading their company and people on this journey.

A PricewaterhouseCoopers survey of Australian-based manufacturing in December 2006 revealed that 81 per cent of companies surveyed were short of skilled labour. This skills shortage is a major barrier to improving productivity, which is fundamental to industry sustainability, prosperity and ensuring Australia remains internationally competitive.

Companies aspiring to compete on the global stage are universally aware of the challenges in simply attracting and employing enough people to sustain growth and market position. Far fewer companies realise that this is only part of the journey: the real challenge is in effectively aligning employees to company goals. To do this, companies need to develop managers with the necessary skills to manage for high performance, while simultaneously rolling out initiatives that will support managers in their work.

Sadly, this is an area in which Australia still lags. About 53 per cent of respondents to the PwC manufacturing survey did not have an internal program to support the development and alignment of people to the culture of their company. This represents a serious flaw in Australian industry.

Companies in this sector have no choice. They must integrate their people strategy with their business strategy; implement measures to retain and engage the staff they need; and support key stakeholders to work together to understand and address skills shortage issues through a more holistic and innovative approach.

Engaging employees

Industrial products companies have encountered many unique challenges in recent years. At the forefront has been the difficulty in developing an integrated and cohesive workforce composed of staff from a range of social and cultural backgrounds, and harnessing a workforce where not all staff are skilled or motivated towards developing a professional career. In this environment, incentivising staff and maximising individual performance in a way that is financially viable and that aligns to corporate goals is a critical but complex task.

The struggle to understand and maximise the strategic value that a human resources function can offer is not new: HR has a mixed track record in providing effective support to business. But when the gamut of day-to-day operations and people and change management issues is left with inexperienced or unqualified line management, sustaining performance becomes impossible.

In short, the people business is real business.

Failing to convince employees of their importance in enabling change can negate the potential benefits of the best-designed transformation project.

PwC's manufacturing survey found that 75 per cent of all business improvement activities failed to realise forecast productivity gains because staff felt left out and lacked the motivation, skills and/or knowledge to adapt to new systems and procedures.

Failing to engage staff in performance improvement projects often leads to increased absenteeism and staff turnover and can make it increasingly difficult for companies to attract talented people. Thus, a poorly managed project can have a broader effect than simply failing to achieve the benefits available from that one initiative.

The problem is that many employers will not respond until it is too late. Typically, employees do not directly state that they are uncomfortable with change. Rather, their lack of engagement with the business will manifest in various ways, such as increased days off, lost time due to injury and poor contribution to continuous improvement activities.

These indicators of staff dissatisfaction should be seen not only as an issue in themselves but also as indicators of your success in aligning people to your business goals and vision.

A framework for thinking about organisational change

Consider this real life example. An Australian manufacturing company needed to expand its operations to increase productivity and reach its growth goals over the next three years. A strong business case was put forward that the Melbourne division should move to a new plant with twice the floor space and the capacity to expand its product offering. The perfect site was found only 30 kilometres from the division's current location.

The company invested heavily in sourcing the best equipment from around the world to make this new site the most technologically advanced in the industry and gain a distinct advantage over local competitors. Process improvement consultants were engaged to examine the company's manufacturing methods and to ensure the design of the new plant was as efficient as possible. The consultants recommended changes to a number of job roles to streamline processes and predicted impressive savings for the company.

Employees were advised of the impending move and any changes to their role via a memo from human resources. The memo indicated that staff would be provided a tour of the new facility and given any necessary technical training on the new equipment during the first month of operation at the new plant.

The first few months at the new plant were difficult. Production was nowhere near expected levels. Employees reported daily technical issues with the new equipment and questioned the benefits of the changes. The number of products being rejected in the testing phase indicated quality issues in production. Absenteeism increased and a number of employees resigned.

This example is not uncommon, and may even sound familiar. Recent research by CSC and the AMA found that 41 per cent of change programs failed and that of the 59 per cent rated successful, only half met the expectations of senior management.

A PwC survey run in conjunction with research specialists Ipsos MORI in the late 1990s found that nine of the top 10 barriers to change are people-related.

Organisational change typically occurs as a reaction to specific opportunities or threats in the marketplace. Notions of improving quality, getting closer to the customer or increasing productivity are likely to be cited as the motivations for change. But no matter the motivation, the goal must be to make fundamental changes in how business is conducted to thrive in a new, more challenging market environment.

This means that a change project will affect many elements of how the company operates, from processes to technology, facilities and people.

To make organisational change effective, it is essential to adopt the right processes and technology and have the right facilities, and to streamline the way these work together. These components are mechanical and standardised, and methodologies, measurements and best practice guidelines are available to optimise them. However, the people element underpins all of these elements: leadership, judgement, flexibility and innovation are needed for success.

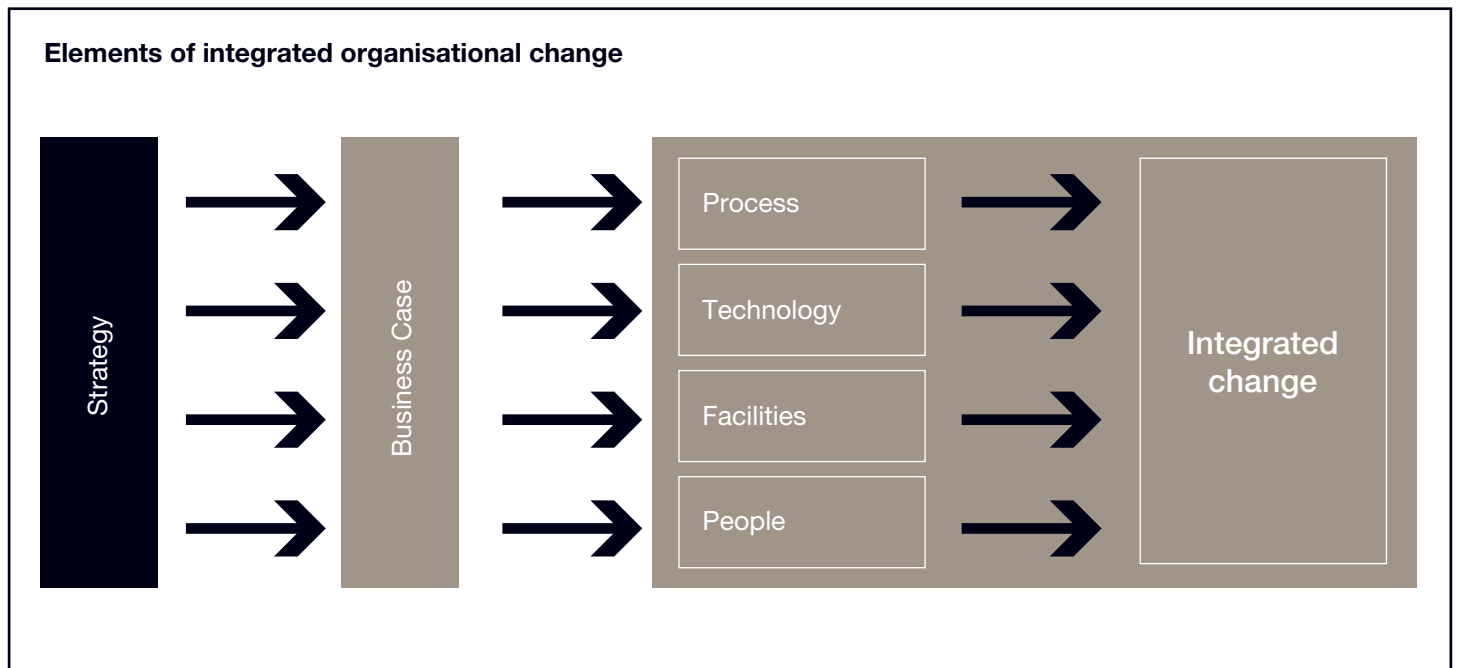
As such, people could be viewed as the most critical ingredient to improved performance.

The people aspects of business strategy – such as altering behaviours, gaining buy-in, managing transfers into and out of the company and providing training at the right time – are critical to achieving the desired benefits. But they are often poorly executed or overlooked. Why?

The people challenges are often seen to be softer or less tangible, time-consuming and more difficult to tackle. But much of the people stuff is not soft at all. It's about doing the simple, tangible and practical things that make sure you take your people along with you towards your company's goals. And while it can be very difficult to measure, when you do get the people aspects right, the benefits are immense.

Good to Great, the bestseller by the US business consultant Jim Collins, is testament to that. Research in his book was aimed at understanding what differentiates the best companies from the rest, and primarily cites a company's capacity to engage its employees and create a coherent and adaptable culture as the drivers.

Effectively engaging employees and encouraging them to change relies largely on understanding the critical levers of human behaviour. When considered at a broad level, these levers have a significant impact on the tone and morale within a company – otherwise referred to as culture.



A better understanding of what culture means can help you appreciate the range of tools and approaches that can be applied to change behaviour and develop new ways of working consistent with the core values of your company. Any program must take account of these levers if it is to achieve lasting behavioural change.

The PwC culture model describes the key drivers of individual behaviour and company culture. The model demonstrates that a range of factors influences employee behaviour and performance. A multifaceted approach must be taken to aligning people to business strategy – especially during times of change.

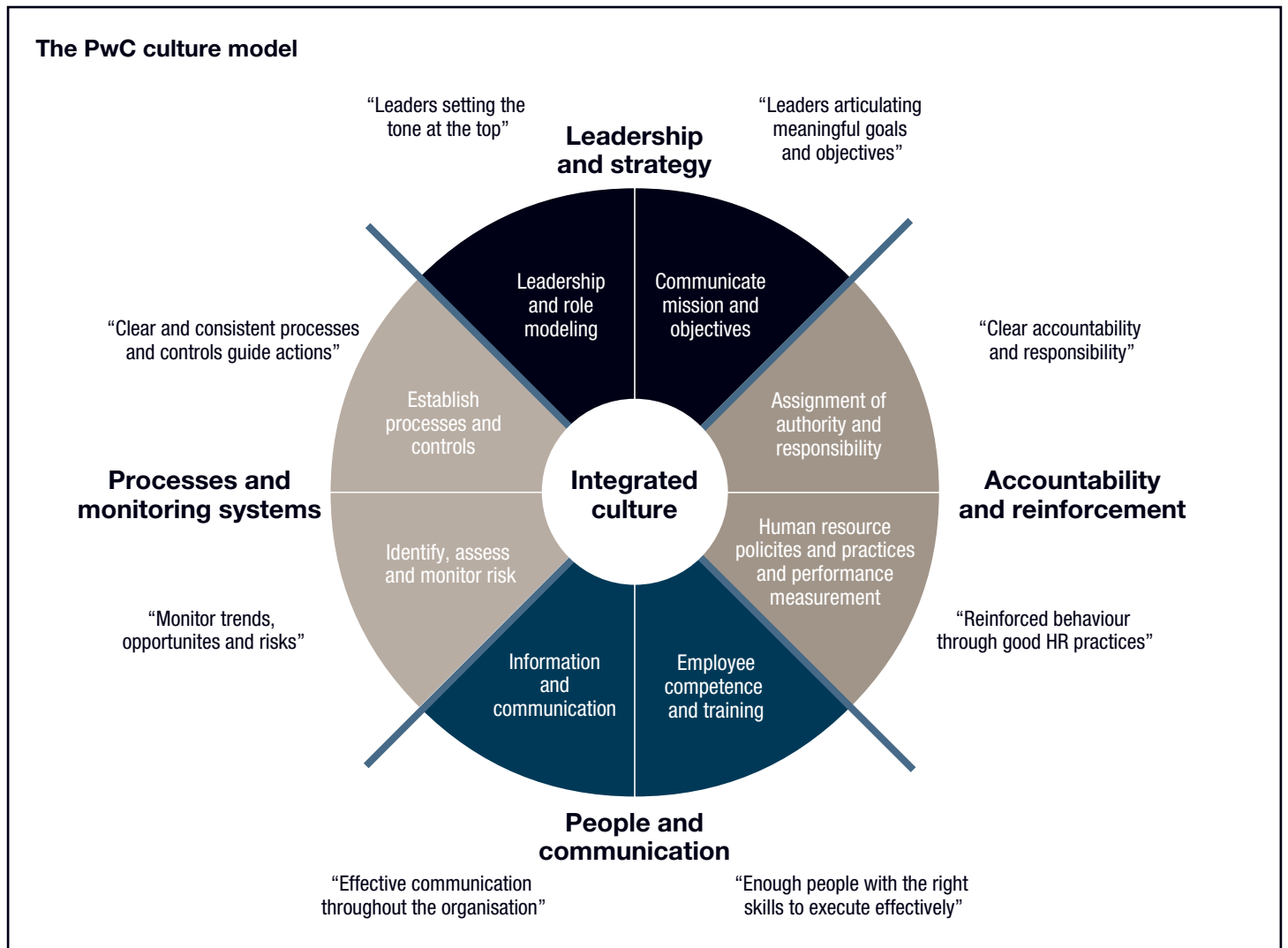
The advantages of applying this definition of culture centre on the fact that the indicators are tangible, identifiable, observable and therefore measurable – enabling diagnosis of the current state. As such, a company’s culture can be influenced by conscious and deliberate actions, enabling well-executed change programs to deliver the intended performance benefits.

The X factor

With a framework to understand the levers of behavioural change, companies can approach the implementation and management of change in a structured and robust way. But the task is not complete. You may pull all the levers in the behavioural change model and still struggle to generate high levels of commitment from staff.

Dynamic, ever-changing business environments require extraordinary effort and commitment from the people most affected by change – the staff on the front line. Only strong leadership can inspire such effort. Companies with many managers and few leaders will find it difficult to engage and retain employees. While management’s mandate is to minimise risk and keep the system operating, change is about creating a new system and engaging employees to help effect that change.

Leading change is both essential and difficult. It requires interpersonal skills and competencies that may need to be recruited or developed within your company. These skills



include an expressive communication style and the ability to communicate the importance of change to generate enthusiasm, confidence and trust.

Communication comes in both words and deeds. Talking about change is not enough: leaders must walk the talk. Leaders' behaviours are instrumental in evoking belief in change and moving individuals towards commitment. Nothing undermines change more than leaders whose behaviour is inconsistent with their words.

Responses to PwC's manufacturing survey revealed the importance of leadership and communication in driving business performance. Nearly 50 per cent of all companies

surveyed believed the quality of leadership and associated communication within their company had to improve for the business to grow.

Leading companies are beginning to understand the importance of effective leadership in enabling change, and developing approaches to bolster their capability in this area. Typically, they are adopting leadership development programs that focus on developing skills and behaviours necessary to successfully execute change. In addition, progressive companies are adopting talent management and succession planning programs that ensure a pipeline of skilled leaders is being recruited and developed for the future.

Leading and engaging your workforce

Research over the past two decades has demonstrated the power of visionary leadership in companies. The key to this style of leadership rests on an ability to articulate a deficient status quo and a compelling future that rallies support for needed organisational changes.

Without a sensible vision for change, companies may develop a list of confusing and incompatible projects which take them in the wrong direction or nowhere at all.

To create a compelling vision for change, invest time in developing your own compelling stories for change by considering:

- What is the compelling need for change?
- What is the exciting idea for change?
- What values will be important?
- Which current values must change?
- What will it mean to people?
- How will it affect the lives of those you must convince to change?
- What does the change mean to you?
- What are you, personally, putting at stake?

Change expert John Kotter offers a useful rule of thumb: "If you can't communicate the vision to someone in five minutes or less and get a reaction that signifies both understanding and interest, you are not done" (Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail, first published in the Harvard Business Review in Spring, 1995).

Leading and engaging both groups and individuals through change begins with open and honest conversations, a key element of effective people and performance management.

The skills required to have frank discussions with employees and provide clear, constructive feedback are invaluable during change and when managing day-to-day operations. For this reason, many companies are investing in training their front-line leaders in the skills needed to manage performance.

Whose job is change management?

Change management is often confused with project management. These two interrelated activities require specialist skills and knowledge and have different goals. Project management outlines the specific activities for defining and prescribing how to move a company from point A to point B. Change management outlines the steps needed to assist the individuals and groups affected by the change to commit to it, adopt it and do their jobs in the new way.

The table below further highlights the differences between change management and project management.

Every initiative undertaken in a company requires some level of project management and change management. How much project management is needed will depend on the complexity of the change: how many systems, processes and areas of the organisation will be affected. The level of change management will depend on how much the changes will disrupt individual employees' day-to-day work and the company's culture, value system and history with past changes.

Project management and change management: a comparison

Discipline	Process	Tools	Goals
Project management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiating • Planning • Executing • Monitoring and controlling • Closing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Business case • Benefits realisation methodology • Project snapshot risk register • Issues register • Change register • Financials • Milestone monitor 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work/tasks/milestones are defined and managed • Project costs are accounted for • Risks of the project are mitigated • Issues are escalated
Change management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Planning for change • Managing change • Reinforcing change 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Change impact assessment • Change readiness assessment • Culture assessment • Change response plans (may include communication, training, organisational design, updated performance management systems) • Change progress measurement (e.g. commitment curve) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Align people and behaviour to the change • Support for the change is built • Resistance to the change is addressed • Knowledge and abilities required to implement the change are developed within staff

Source: PMBOK® Guide, Third Edition

Understanding the progress of individuals and groups towards greater engagement with change – through using tools, experience and intuition – is critical. In addition, a change expert has highly developed skills to help individuals progress along the change curve through a wide range of interventions. It is the intersection of these behavioural diagnostic and intervention skills that set change managers apart from project managers.

The capacity of a change manager to understand the right intervention to be applied to the particular group, person or situation is why change management can at times be viewed as an art rather than an exact science.

Effective change management contributes to the return on investment a project can realise by increasing the speed of adoption or how quickly people begin doing their job in the new way; the ultimate utilisation or how many people participate in the change; and the proficiency demonstrated by the people in the company or how effective each employee is at doing their job in the new way.

People-based innovation: a new automotive fuel

Working in a ruthless and cost-competitive industry that in recent years has been tested like never before has failed to dampen the enthusiasm of one Australian CEO*. He says he remains passionate about keeping the Australian automotive industry alive and has a strong belief that companies can survive if they engage with their employees in new ways.

“We have fitted our plant with the most advanced equipment available, but given the international market we operate in, this is par for the course,” he says. “You can have the best equipment, spend millions of dollars on redesigning process flow and doing time-and-motion analysis, but it is ultimately people who make the equipment run. This is why we consider people as a critical factor in every business decision we make.”

Engaging with staff to gain a competitive advantage takes time and effort on a number of levels, the CEO says.

“Firstly, as the leader of this business, I have to actually believe people make a difference – and that hasn’t always been the case,” he says. “Then, I have to reinforce this message to my management team and my staff and find practical ways to engage them in productive discussion.

“As standard practice, our managers sit with each of their staff members four times a year to have a real performance conversation. However, the conversation isn’t one-way traffic: staff must come to the discussion having thought about their job, the business and their satisfaction.

“We want to hear from staff about the good and the bad, but we want to engage them in productive discussion that considers their suggestions on how we can do things better. Staff have found this to be quite empowering. They are made to feel part of the business.”

The CEO requests a briefing from each of his direct reports about when and to whom they have given positive recognition. He has started meeting regularly with staff two levels below – without their managers present – to get a view of what’s really going on in the business. All managers are required to work on the line every three months to ensure they are close to the business and, more importantly, that they are close to the people who do the business.

The company also keeps employees engaged through training and development. It has pledged that it will spend at least 25 per cent of its training budget on non-work related training – training that is focused on developing the whole employee, not just the specific technical skills required to do a current job. The initiative is based on the concept that a happy employee is a productive employee.

“For example, we’ve paid for employees to attend a range of non-work-related training such as cooking classes and I know that this small investment has paid for itself in multiples,” he says. “The impact of such a gesture on employee commitment and productivity is amazing, but not really surprising. There is strong commercial sense in engaging staff on a personal level.”

While this company seeks to avoid complexity, it uses a number of tools to keep the CEO in touch with the business. It runs annual surveys to gauge employees’ engagement and their perception of company values. It also surveys internal customer satisfaction levels. In addition, it has trained a number of its people, including the CEO, in group facilitation skills.

It is critical that productive conversations occur between staff and departments. To effectively manage change and engage people requires that all views are heard and that team dynamics and communication styles are considered. The company believes this so strongly, it regularly seeks external advice on change management.

“In the face of increasing competitive pressure, we are committed to driving productivity improvements and competitive advantage through our people,” the CEO says.

“Some antiquated views still consider the people staff to be soft and fluffy. If you are coming off a normal base of competitive processes and technology, I firmly believe that you drive 10 to 20 per cent of business improvement from process and technology and 80 to 90 per cent through improvement from your people.”

* For reasons of commercial confidentiality, the identity of the CEO and his company must remain anonymous.



Allan Moore
Managing Director
Exide Technologies Asia Pacific

With operations in 89 countries, Exide Technologies is a global leader in stored electrical energy products. It makes and distributes batteries for cars, trucks, boats and materials-handling equipment, and power-generation systems for telecommunications companies, electricity utilities and railroads.

The Exide Technologies operations in Australia and New Zealand use to be part of the Pacific Dunlop Group. In 2000, Pacific Dunlop sold its local and global battery operations to Exide Technologies. I had worked with Pacific Dunlop for 23 years before coming across to Exide as part of that acquisition.

As Exide Australasia, we became part of a larger and broader organisation and the change brought with it different people and cultural aspects of being the smaller part of an international company with a US-based parent. Given our regional location, coupled with the fact that we were trading profitably, we were left to continue to operate with a fair degree of autonomy as priorities were focused on rationalisation and restructuring larger offshore segments of the new organisation.

Following the acquisition the parent company unfortunately went into Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and with this came a massive global restructure and drive for cash. As part of this, the Australian and New Zealand operations participated in a number of potential divestment processes. The first was new to everyone and the people handled it very well. However, as we went through a second and third process, staff morale started to wane and attitudes changed. There was a shift. People, customers and suppliers started to question the local operation's longevity. We had to consider and implement retention strategies for our top people to ensure our company would continue to operate.

During such a process there are many different feelings across the organisation – from senior management down – that can easily have an impact on the performance of both individuals and the business. It certainly creates doubt as to the future but also brings a needed refocus on the business.

Some people are able to run with it all, others don't like the unknown and decide to leave, but in the main our employees have remained very loyal. The challenge for a company is keeping employees motivated. Senior management will be involved in high-level discussions and presentations during due diligence and as they become time-poor their attention is diverted from day-to-day operational issues – which inevitably includes effective people management. This is your biggest business risk in a divestment. I tried as much as possible to have my head office team manage most of the questions and data requirements, but eventually the more detailed requests start to filter down further into the organisation.

Another challenge relates to longer-term strategic planning. If there is the potential that you are not going to continue as part of the existing organisation, your detailed, long-term strategic plans will differ under the current ownership and potential purchasers. This is when some of your senior people in particular start to question where everything is going, but it can also create opportunities for some individuals. We invested time in developing leadership skills and other management capabilities to manage and deal with change.

As with many, our industry is very competitive and that makes change inevitable. You have to be prepared to adapt to the changing environment. You rely on people who can open their minds to this growing trend. Change now occurs every week – globally, in your industry, your geography, your personnel, whatever – so you must educate your managers to be able to effectively operate in this environment.

One thing I know for certain: people make everything happen.

Conclusion

With manufacturing facing critical skills shortages, Australian companies must invest in the design of people strategies that are tailored to their needs and that take account of critical pressures in the marketplace. Those that neglect to do so at best face significantly lower productivity and growth, and at worst a threat to their viability and survival. The task of finding, attracting and retaining the right people will be all the more difficult in an environment of constant business change.

In such an environment, the most successful companies will be those that learn to continuously adapt to change – in all its guises.

Few senior executives are daunted by the idea of changing their company's technology or processes, but many are intimidated by the prospect of changing the behaviour of their people and adopting effective practices to keep the skills their business needs.

Driving productivity increases through people will require a broader consideration of what is important to employees and what will maximise their commitment to the company. This requires that companies seek to know their staff, and understand the dual perspectives of both company and employee. Demographic trends and employment practices tell us that a command-and-control approach will no longer be effective. Broader consideration of employees is required, where development opportunities, career progression and employee participation become paramount to success.

There is no silver bullet – attracting, retaining and developing staff to improve employee engagement, and ultimately productivity, is not simple. As a first step, Australian manufacturing companies must recognise that people are their most important yet often most undervalued asset. Companies that spend time and effort developing and engaging their people are making an investment that will produce real returns.

Take action

- Use diagnostic tools such as surveys to discover how your people are feeling and how likely it is you will be able to engage them in changes to your business.
- Assess the change management skills within your business. If you do not have the skills you need, consider recruiting or buying them in.
- Understand the key changes that are occurring within your business right now and ask yourself what it would feel like to be on the receiving end of such change.
- Invest time in developing your own compelling stories for change and a clear vision that you can communicate in five minutes or less.
- Recognise, reward and develop staff to retain the people you will need to survive the chronic skilled labour shortage.
- Make a concerted effort to ensure your company has strong leadership and bench-strength for the future.
- Adapt your work environment and management style to the varied values, work practices and expectations of what will become a diverse workforce.
- Align your people and business strategies to quantify the returns on your investment in people.

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Graeme Billings leads the Industrial Products practice for PricewaterhouseCoopers in Australia. He has over 25 years experience providing assurance, transaction and consulting services with multinational and national clients in the automotive, construction and general manufacturing industries.

Graeme draws on his extensive experience with acquisitions and mergers and other business investigation areas such as due diligence, investigating accountants' reports, fraud investigations and internal control reports.

As a regular media commentator on the Ai Group/PwC Performance of Manufacturing Index, Graeme provides insight into the direction and challenges of the manufacturing sector.

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Dylan is a Senior Manager in the Performance Improvement Advisory practice and works closely with clients to help them address people and change related issues associated with a wide range of business improvement activities.

Dylan's work has primarily focussed on assisting organisations to develop and implement change interventions, to measure and understand the impact of culture on business outcomes and to develop strategies to address issues related to talent development and learning.

Dylan has worked in a range of organisations in the manufacturing, financial, telecommunications and government sectors both in Australia and internationally and has spent time both as a consultant and in industry.

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