

Business Leaders Forum

The Business Leaders Forum is organised by Obsidian Consulting, a business consultancy, and the British Antarctic Survey, a world leader in research into global environmental issues, acting in partnership. It was formed when a group of interested senior figures from businesses based in the East of England attended a seminar run by the partners called “Adapt and Prosper” in Cambridge, in November 2007, which explored some of the potential impacts of climate change and other environmental considerations on companies. Further meetings have taken issues forward, exploring how organisations can effectively be aligned to new strategies, be they environmental, CSR or driven by other priorities.

Meeting No 4, on April 28th 2009 enjoyed additional sponsorship from Taylor Vinters.

The following summarises the debate:

“Maximising Engagement in Change”

Embedding a culture of social responsibility; striving for carbon neutrality; developing market orientation; responding to stakeholder imperatives. Whatever the driver for change, for new ways of thinking and behaving to permeate an organisation is a challenge for instigators, usually those at the top of the hierarchy. The Forum focused on 3 questions relating to meeting this challenge:

1. What are the main obstacles to obtaining engagement in change?
2. How may these be addressed effectively?
3. What has been learned by delegates about what works and what does not?

The organisers are grateful for the contributions of all attending. Companies represented:

BAA
Bidwells
Birkett Long
British Antarctic Survey
Business in the
Community
Cambridge Building
Society
Cambridge University
Press

Cambridge Water
Camcon
ConstructionSkills
Crightons of
Peterborough
Ensors
Handelsbanken
Herbert Group
Ipswich Building Society
Moneymatters

Obsidian Consulting
Paperfeel
Peters Elworthy Moore
Polysolar
Saffron Building Society
Taylor Vinters
Thursday Cottage

What sort of obstacles may prevent smooth change?	How can change be lubricated?
Conservatism: resistance to change; fear of the unknown; nostalgia for the old ways; and office politics, may all hold back some people, at any level.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There must be a clear vision to aim for and to allow planning • Legislation may help define objectives. • It's a good idea to create dissatisfaction with the status quo. • Convert risk aversion to risk management.
Legislation may prevent realignment or removal of under-performers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Put committed people in place, able to deliver and manage the performance. • Link reward to achievement of vision.
Procrastination. Events – commercial priorities and economic circumstances can disrupt the process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just get on with it. It is for the future but you need to work on it today. • Keep going. The vision must pull you forward.
Expecting edict to be sufficient	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication, up and down, face-to-face wherever possible. • Adopt open-ness; constantly update; listen to valid objections; • Consult about how, not whether to change. • Help staff see the need objectively.
"Terrorists" – spoilers protecting comfort zone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify and address pockets of resistance. • Motivate and re-assure; ultimately act ruthlessly if necessary
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Directors must buy in, genuinely; lead by example; and act in concert. • Identify and use champions of change at all levels.

What are the key lessons for others considering major change?

Vision must be long-term; and strategy not deflected by events.

It is all about the people: knowing them; identifying leaders and restrainers; and managing these appropriately.

Often, those expected to resist may say: "*why did it not happen before?*" - so do not procrastinate if change is the right thing.

You cannot communicate too little!

Further events are planned.