

WINDS OF CHANGE RUN INTO REALITY

Barack Obama and his advisers have a lot to answer for. In a way that defines the sloganeering global village, they turned the eye-glazing jargon of management consultants into the world's most potent political shorthand.

From Kurdistan to Tasmania, Japan to Iran, London to Sydney and an alarming number of places in between, "change" is the preferred political buzzword. Trying to find the similarities between Yukio Hatoyama, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, David Cameron, Nuri al-Maliki, Will Hodgman, Nick Clegg and Barry O'Farrell would test most people.

Yet each uses the promise of change: from the slavish, "Yes, we can change it", and banal, "Real change", to the action words, "Vote for change" and our very own "Start the change", from touchy feely, "Change that works for you", to the order, "Change". It is hard to imagine that a single word has so captured and defined a mood since the French Revolution and its alluring trio - liberte, egalite, fraternite.

For much of the first year of his presidency, the promise Obama would deliver "change we can believe in" was looking dangerously like something that would gal-

vanise another generation of cynical disengagement. Then within a week he delivered health-care reforms, freed up \$75 billion to increase access to tertiary education and found a way to agree with the Russians and reduce the number of nuclear weapons threatening the planet. Not a bad week at the office.

But every sinew of Obama's reforms is



stretched by the reality of how they were won - the result of hard, complex, number-crunching work inspired by heart-breaking stories, but fraught with compromise, fear, uncertainty and ugly recriminations.

Yet ultimately faith in that exceptionalist American sentiment, "we don't fear the future ... we shape it", prevailed. As the President said in his first speech after the healthcare legislation won the votes it needed to become law, "This legislation will not fix everything that ails our healthcare system. But it moves us decisively in the right direction. This is what change looks like."

Obama is such a skillful politician he always knew that changing anything as complex as the American health system would require painstaking, incremental work on wicked problems. Making it happen required political leadership coupled with strategic policy development and ability to deliver.

The NSW Liberal leader, Barry O'Farrell, is promising a "radical change of attitude that flicks the switch from stagnation to action". It is hard to disagree with the sentiment, but making it happen, cutting through the vested interests, will demand deep knowledge, steady leadership and a public service able to do the hard, detailed work of strategy and implementation.

The reality is that change that lasts builds on what has gone before. As the tor-

tuous, angry path to health reform in America showed on the news most nights, there is no magic wand that can be waved without blood being shed.

This preference for fundamental, yet incremental, change is captured in the blueprint to reform the Australian public service, Ahead of the Game, released in Canberra this week.

It is a comprehensive and careful document, the product of detailed knowledge of the history and theory of effective public

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management - tempered with the compromises of political reality. It aims to strengthen the capacity of the public service for frank and fearless advice, while focusing much more on the needs of citizens.

Because political news has generally been reduced to a gladiatorial contest between government and opposition, with colour provided by independents and minor parties, it is easy to forget how much the quality of life in Australia has been shaped by the collaboration, and at times robust contest, between elected politicians and public servants.

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In its 109-year history the relationship between the Australian public service and politicians has varied depending on personalities and prevailing ideologies. Over this time our version of the Westminster system has also changed. Ministers are increasingly held responsible for operational as well as political decisions.

This can provoke tension between them and their advisers and departments, and adds another element to a department secretary's job description - "shock absorber". Decades ago mandarins ruled and politicians came and went, then the balance changed and the policy process was opened to more perspectives, before being replaced with market logic that mostly made the public in public service a dirty word.

Now departmental secretaries complain

of having to manage complex organisations in the glare of a 24-hour news cycle with insufficient time for a long-term strategic approach.

As a result, the public service became intensely risk averse, keen to appease interest groups and the shrill demands of never-ending politics. Expertise was stripped out of many departments, there was little cross agency collaboration and pay and conditions varied greatly. It was scarcely surprising when an international survey ranked Australia poorly for strategic policy capacity in 2007.

The business of government is the largest enterprise in the country, and the biggest lever of change in our lives. Every day the human services departments alone receive 220,000 phone calls, undertake 361,000 face-to-face meetings and conduct 70,000 online transactions. Every day.

These points of connection are set to expand exponentially in the new web 2.0 era, marked by more participation and access to information, and much higher expectations. Preparing for the impact will require great agility and openness to innovation.

As the global financial crisis showed, the need for effective regulation, strategic policy, swift and decisive action is something



that can only be provided by a highly skilled public service. The fact Australia navigated this crisis so well is a tribute to the quality of this expertise.

Yet over the next decade, nearly half the country's public servants will be eligible to retire, so this is time for renewal. The looming challenges - climate change, globalisation, population growth and ageing - are as great as any in peacetime, and require strategic, persuasive and deft public servants.

If the blueprint succeeds in minimising risk aversion and building capacity, while connecting more effectively with citizens, the public service is likely to attract more of the best and brightest. In the spirit of the age they are likely to be people keen to help make change a meaningful reality, but without standing for election.

Julianne Schultz is the editor of Griffith REVIEW.

Source: The Sydney Morning Herald

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Personal development: Why work?

How many people do you know who are happy with their jobs? Perhaps you are one who is working just to survive and make ends meet, deriving little satisfaction from your employment. Those who find fulfillment, joy and contentment in their work do exist, but they are not the majority. One thing is sure: to be fulfilling and ultimately satisfying, work needs a long-range goal and an overall opportunity for personal development.

The many books, articles and



reports that address the state of various national workforces testify to the fact that something is fundamentally wrong with the modern approach to working life. Note this comment from an anonymous essay on the Internet: "Work" as we know it tends to make us unhappy

because we do so much of it, because it is so repetitive, because we don't get to choose what we do, and because what we are doing is often not in the best interest of our fellow human beings." Many of us could echo that observation.

Of course, a number of factors contribute to the sense of well-being we can draw from our employment. Similarly there are specific causes for the dissatisfaction that workers experience. Identifying them may provide some helpful insight.

Goodbye job security, hello flexibility

Few people I meet in Sydney seem to have full-time jobs of the old-fashioned nine-to-five kind. Those I meet - doctors, graphic designers, teachers, journalists, sales assistants - often seem to be part-time, casual, freelance, self-employed, or on contract.

All the combinations of how to click into the work world are played out here. It's a place of flux and motion, one which styles itself as a global city and has more of a global way of doing things - fast, loose and transitory - than other Australian cities. Many people appear as if poised for flight - they'll do one thing for a while, then they'll do something else, somewhere else. It is part of the Sydney character to have half an ear cocked, half a bag packed, ready for the next.

I meet a freelance animator in her thirties who says: "I've always been able to get work", before she acknowledges that there has always been money for projects in the 10 years she has been working.

I meet a subcontracting clown doctor in a labour-hire web, hired on a daily rate



by a multinational that makes chocolates and donates her services to the Children's Hospital at Randwick.

And over dinner, she and a freelance graphic designer, both women in their forties, talk about their jobs in the way they may have talked about men. How it's good for now, but it's also insecure. What about when they are old and grey? Or when times turn bad? Who will look after them?

The clown doctor's part-time work intrudes into the rest of her life. "There's emails every day so you have to follow up - it seeps in. There are a lot of part-time employees and you get emails from them at 10pm and you think why are they [at work] so late?"

The designer misses superannuation, but the only jobs she has been offered have been casual or contract - work that doesn't include super. She is on the second tier of the workforce.

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Blueprint for success

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Discovery is defined as examining where you are now and where you are going.

It helps to look at everything as if you were a beginner. Always know why you are in the business of your choice. If your strategy is not clear, you won't recognize the destination when you get there. This is the time to bring in your outside Vision Team. Vision is who you are about and what your life is about.

This is where you determine values you need to experience on a continuing basis. Vision is also where you become the expert in your field and decide the purpose of your business. Remember, the smaller the niche, the larger the reward. Abandon any preconceived beliefs you have about this or any other business. They can restrict your thinking. Live out of this new vision, not your past comfort.

Planning creates the strategies that help you arrive at your destination.

A simple system is to - Show Up, Be on Time, Keep Your Word and Tell The Truth. It's like riding on that

train, sometimes there are hills to climb; sometimes there are curves and other times you're flying rapidly down the mountain to your destination. In any instance, you must remain focused on what you want and where you are going.

Benchmarking helps you stay on track.

Once focused, you set up a system for accountability, self-management and self-renewal. You can create goals or optimum wants that may be on the outer edge of possibilities or a goal that is far bigger than you think is attainable. Going into new territory can unlock your potential and increase your development. When goals or optimum results are achieved, you can acknowledge success and learn to be satisfied. Again, put it in writing; the goals, the results and the acknowledgement.

Rules require exceptions, so even if you follow the above and create a strong foundation, you must be prepared for chaos. Chaos can aid in your personal and business development if you have eliminated all toxic people or commitments from your life.

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