

## MANAGEMENT Gill South



# Picturing change

## A Beca engineer comes up with a powerful change management tool

say you're selling products. If you're selling a phone, you've got this nice, clunky doorstop of a manual. Which is fine. But let the first chapter tell me the three most important features and how to maximise their use.

If you're selling an info-product like an article-writing course, tell them the most important things to focus on, instead of everything.

If you're selling training, this depends on the length of your course, but two or three days can pack in a lot. What's the most important "idea" you want me to take away each day? In three days, which are the three most important ideas?

If you're selling consultancy, again, you can promise me bucketloads of advice. But what's the most important?

Feature creep creeps. And having crept, it becomes creepy. Creepy enough for customers to get intimidated.

And want to return things. Or even worse, not use something at all. This is really bad, not just for current business, but for future business as well.

But point out what's important. Show me how to use what's important. And give me full control of what's important. And then I'll play around with those eighteen thousand and seventy-four features.

And in doing so, banish "feature creep" forever — or at least, until the next gizmo arrives. ■

*Sean D'Souza is CEO of Psychotactics, and is an international author, speaker and trainer.*

feeding dozens of megawatts of power into the grid via a submarine cable.

There's certainly no shortage of marine energy to be tapped. OPD calculates that waves crashing on to Britain's shoreline could meet its power needs three times over, and that about a quarter of the potential is recoverable.

Curlett, who describes his background as more commercially than environmentally orientated, says what the Atlantic delivers to Britain, Antarctica serves up on the New Zealand coast.

"We have an excellent wave pattern that is very predictable coming out of the Antarctic, with long swells that are ideally suited to this technology."

To extract the waves' energy, the Pelamis is moored in about 50m of water, with 70 per cent of its bulk submerged. The mooring system, for which a patent is being sought, uses weights and floats so the lines are never taut and the Pelamis always points into the waves. The amount of resistance in the hydraulic rams between the modules is adjustable to the sea conditions and the machine is designed to last 20 years.

First, though, the Pelamis has to navigate unknown regulatory waters. Curlett doesn't see that being a big deal since the machines will be anchored well offshore. The only structure will be an onshore substation where a single cable from each wave farm will land.

The challenge is turning new technology into commercial reality, he says. "But when we succeed it's going to provide a tremendous resource for New Zealand." All power to Pelamis. ■

*Anthony Doesburg is an Auckland-based technology journalist.*

ONE OF the biggest challenges for dynamic 21st century companies is communicating change. How do you get staff and clients on board as quickly as possible,

understanding new systems and roles?

The large multi-disciplinary engineering consultancy, Beca, is conveying new management messages to staff and clients on a regular basis.

Gavin Cormack, chairman of the New Zealand company, talks on the Beca website about his staff's creative thinking as being one of the main contributors in providing a high level of service to clients.

And it's not just PR talk. The company, with 1900 staff in over 20 countries, is making the most of the artistic talent of one of its project managers, whose clever impressions are helping to convey change-management messages far more effectively than any PowerPoint presentation.

Martin Coates was trained as a chemical engineer in South Africa, then worked in Britain with the Bass brewery, subsequently taken over by Coors. Three years ago he arrived in New Zealand to become project manager of asset performance at Beca, his job to ensure plant or factories run efficiently.

While working for Bass, he had used what he calls visual aids to communicate change to the client and he is doing that here — both in his own job and for Beca colleagues.

"When you offer a proposal to a client... how do they get a handle on getting internal buy-in from their own workforce if they want to put a new machine in? How do they get understanding about what they want to achieve rather than a lot of words? With an illustration," he says.

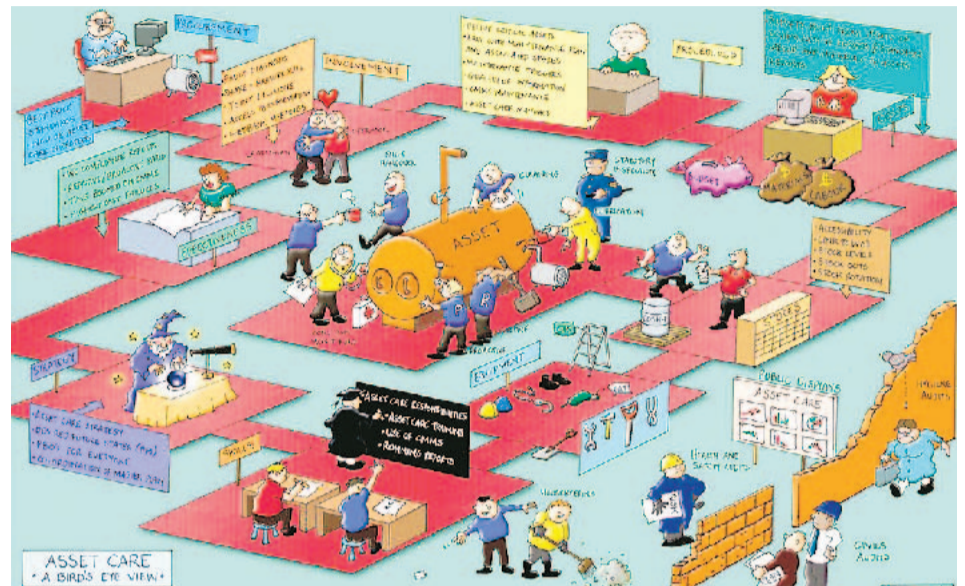
The pictures, often with an injection of humour, are not unlike Dilbert cartoons. But they are more detailed than a first glance might suggest. In the busy images, Coates will draw people as identifiable characters.

"People say, 'That's my role'. That's a very strong tool. People can relate quite closely to that," says Coates.

Technical professionals have to realise that they are specialised and what they find easy to understand is not as easily absorbed by the layperson, he says.

"Engineering is as much about people as it is about designing and building things. It's a fact that some people relate better to visual stimulus and I think there is a need for all businesses to recognise this," says Coates.

The engineer remembers a situation while in a management role in Britain. "The decision-makers responsible for implementing the changes were clear on what needed to be done. But they struggled to engage the factory workers in the change using the usual group presentation scenario, complete with slides and handouts. The workers had difficulty understanding what the changes



One of Martin Coates' "big picture" illustrations of organisational change.

### PICTURE POWER

- Graphics can convey complicated change more clearly than words.
- An illustration ensures everyone forms the same mental picture.

were, let alone the reasons for making them."

With a single picture up on the wall and no bullet points, he showed people where they fitted in. "It was a great success," says Coates.

The beauty of a clever drawing is "everyone gets the same mental picture", he says.

"By representing the entire operations of the factory in pictorial form, including raw material inputs, product outputs, the various plant and machinery and, of course, the workers themselves, they were able to get an overview of the big picture. They were able to see how their role contributed to the business' goals, and understand why change needed to happen, and where they fitted in."

The alternative is far less persuasive.

"We're facing death by bullet point because of our obsession with listing talking points on overhead slides. The problem with that is, especially in change-management situations, often we need to get across really complicated messages to a wide range of people, who all respond differently to various types of communication tools."

Can anyone with artistic talent do these drawings? Coates says you have to have management experience so you have the knowledge to depict the roles of everyone from the manager to the assembly line worker.

"It's about being able to visualise a concept and being able to understand a complex network. It's about being able to show it as an entire picture with all the key elements," he says.

It's a whole untapped area, says Coates, who is working, with Beca's permission, alongside management consultant Russell Ness, a leadership coach with a design background. Ness, who consults with Beca, among others,

helps companies improve business performance and change management.

Coates' relationship with Ness has introduced the chemical engineer to a variety of large non-industrial and public sector groups that have HR and organisational challenges.

Coates is keen to expand his expertise outside Beca; meanwhile, the news of his skills is still travelling throughout his company.

Rob Ross, technical director of the food and beverages division at Beca, has been one of Coates' biggest fans at the company.

"People have to buy into any improvement," he says. And sometimes it is hard to see the change when it is being related in documentation.

"Most people don't like doing that.

Factory workers, when they see the benefit, can relate to it. There is a complete message [in the impression]."

"In our part of Beca, most of the clients are running industry processes of

change. There are numbers of staff and we are trying to convince them to take on the changes; it works across the whole spectrum of

people," says Ross.

Some clients think at first that Coates' drawings lack the necessary detail, but he will do before and after pictures if required.

The drawing has to do a number of things — explain the new system but also ensure that the client understands what was wrong with the old system — says Ross.

Although there is a lot of information being handed out in a client presentation, Coates' impression is typically the central point of discussion.

"I think it will just grow with the awareness," Ross says. Of the 20 or 30 parts of Beca, around seven departments are now using Coates' skills. While there are still the usual engineering drawings, Coates' are used to introduce change.

"It does help procedures; you have to be quite clear about what is required. To get across the big picture or the vision, this is so much better," says Ross. ■

*Gill South is a freelance business writer based in Auckland.*

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