



AGILE CHANGE
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Achieving real behavioural change

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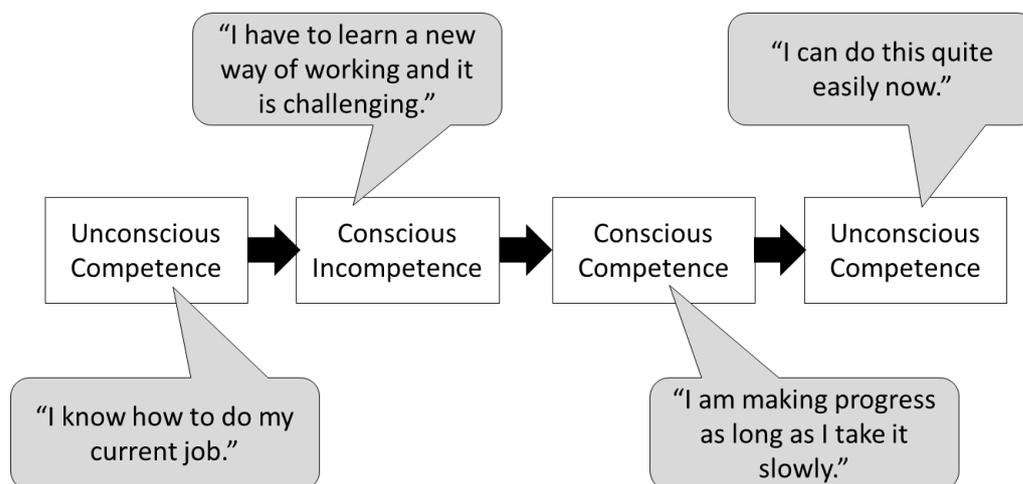


Introduction

This is a summary of a presentation I gave to the Change Forum in an organisation who are keen to learn how to implement change more effectively. I was asked to speak about any aspect of behavioural change, and what you will read comes from the heart. On behalf of my clients (currently a utility company, a regulator, a university, a charity and a telecoms company) I am closely involved in helping people adopt new ways of working. These are some of the key themes that I experience in all change programmes across all industries.

Why is behavioural change difficult?

First of all, let's consider what change does to someone. Up until a change is introduced, an individual is working away quite happily, using processes and skills that they are familiar with. They have built up 'unconscious competence' in other words they have an automatic ability to do their work because they have done it so many times before. As their response is automatic, it means that their brains can act on autopilot, allowing them to think about other things whilst they work. When a change is introduced it is a rude awakening. We are effectively telling people, stop doing the things you know how to do, do them differently, using techniques and processes that you don't know. This means force them into a state of 'conscious incompetence'. They have to concentrate to work in the new way. They are likely to make mistakes and they will have to keep practising to build up their skills. Eventually, over time they will return to a state of unconscious competence in the new way of working, but during the transition from old to new ways of working they will be stressed, they will fear making mistakes and being criticised or punished and their rate of productivity will fall as they try things for the first time.



Based on the description above, it is no wonder that making change happen is difficult. We are effectively asking people to learn a new habit, and that takes time and it takes effort.

5 basic rules for behaviour change

In my experience, if we want to help people work in new ways, there are five factors we have to address:

- Change is unrelenting – change does not happen until everyone is on board
- New behaviours takes a village not an individual – we need a network of change agents
- Simple steps are easier to learn and adopt – break everything into tiny habits
- Time to talk is essential – simplify existing ways of working to create time for change
- Line managers – their approval is vital

1. Change is unrelenting – change does not happen until everyone is on board

Change is adopted by different people at different speeds. Some people find change exciting, and it is something that they actively seek out. When presented with anything new, they engage immediately, irrespective of whether the change is useful or not. The key factor is that they are involved in something new, it stops them becoming bored.

Others are open to the idea of change and if you explain the scope of the change and why it is important, they will adopt it. As they come on board early in the process, they are often useful advocates for those who are more hesitant as their experiences of adopting change provides an important example of how change is achievable.

The rest of us will change, but we need more persuasion and we need to watch others first. It takes us longer to be convinced by the need for change, and we need encouragement, reassurance and support as we take tentative steps towards new ways of working. This means Change Managers need to be in constant contact. We need to be aware of when people are becoming unsure and step in with encouragement and positive examples of how the change can work. We need to provide one to one coaching, we need to give people opportunities to participate in the change and we need to step in with the reasons for the change when resistance is felt.

My best analogy for this is watching a sheep dog at work herding sheep towards the desired destination. The sheep dog actually engages to move the sheep forward, but all of the time is using its peripheral vision to assess who is moving off at a tangent and needs to be brought back to the group. They are completely dedicated to the task in hand. They are not distracted by anything else happening around them.

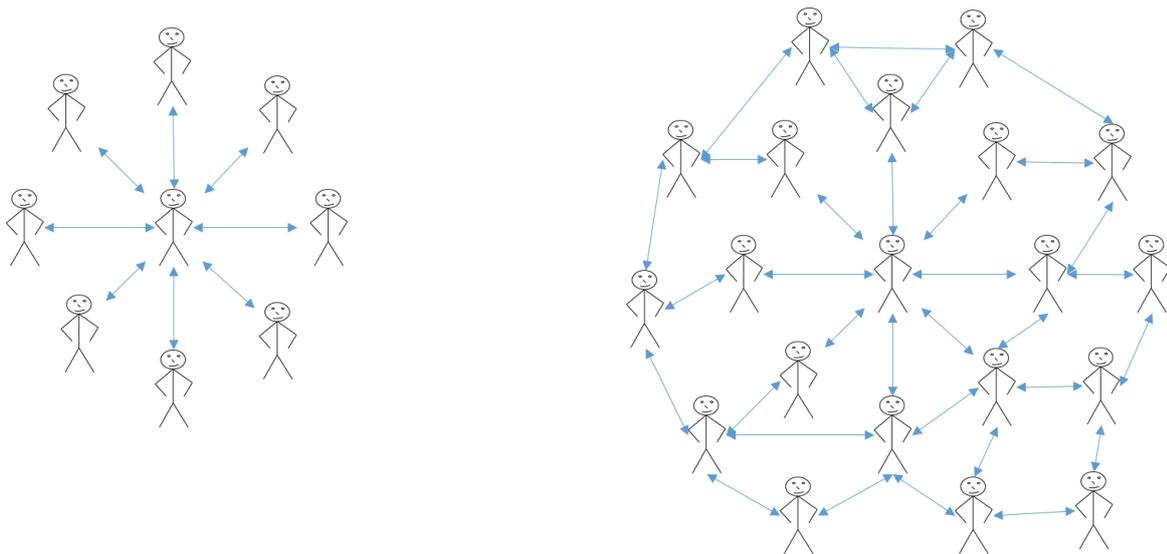
Change Managers need to share the same traits. I heard a presentation from a talented change manager recently, telling us about the last 3 years of his life as he shepherded 8500 people through an organisational change. He was honest enough to say that towards the end he was exhausted and once the change was embedded he took weeks off work to recover. This is because he had spent those 3 years fully present in his work. Always assessing the level of participation in his change, the general mood of those affected and stepping in, sometimes with some encouraging words, at other times with more formal workshops and presentations. He kept the momentum going and he kept the change at the forefront of peoples minds so

that they incorporated it into all aspects of their work. Exhausting but ultimately successful, and a great blueprint for what change management really involves.

2. New behaviours takes a village not an individual – we need a network of change agents

Connected with the unrelenting nature of the Change Manager role is the need for high levels of participation. Change cannot be achieved top down. What we really need is a constantly developing network of change agents who are passionate in their belief that the change is the right way to go. We have a responsibility to transmit our enthusiasm so they will take the message forward to all those they engage with.

This network needs to be wider than a pyramid scheme because it needs to bring in those on the periphery of the change who are also impacted by it so that they can transmit it to their networks. One of the most powerful questions I ask when planning change communications is 'Who are your stakeholders stakeholders?' This widens the identification of those we need to involve from the obvious people, those who will need to work differently. It includes those that they work with and those that are the recipients of their work or those that provide them with essential inputs to do their work.



Along with the size of the network that you build must be the recognition that it is a living entity. This network needs to constantly update and refresh as we discover more about the impact of our change and more about the business context into which the change will go live. I think I have failed if I have not added about 5% to my change network every couple of weeks. I try to build in thinking time after every meeting about who I talked to and who I think they might talk to next to identify who else we need to be communicating with.

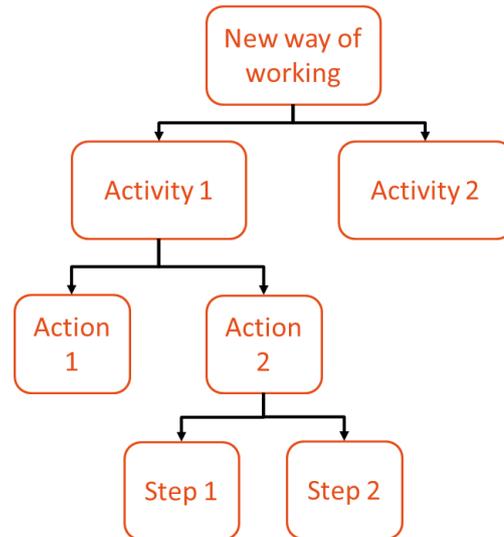
3. Simple steps are easier to learn and adopt – break everything into tiny habits

One of the most powerful realisations that I have come to in the last few years is the myth of empowerment. It is not enough to explain what needs to change and why and then hope that everyone will take time out to work out exactly what this means for their role and then start devising new ways of working. I think as Change Managers we need to provide a lot more information. We need to help those impacted to break the change into simple steps. We shouldn't assume people will do all of this for themselves as they are already busy. Also, change can look like a big piece of work, and we all know that we tell ourselves we will get to that when we get some time, but the bigger the piece of work the more time we assume we need and the less chance there is of finding the time.

To break this vicious circle it is really important to break the change into small, understandable pieces. Now I am not suggesting that we all become experts in how everyone does their job to be able to do this. Instead what we need to do is show people the techniques for making change smaller and easier to understand.

Technique number one is to use a breakdown structure to take any aspect of change and divide it and then sub divide it and then sub divide it again until you end up with simple steps. For example, let's break down the change from manual input of metrics to an automated process. In one of the changes I am involved in we are changing the role of maintenance workers from walking through the factory manually recording equipment temperature to analysing the data. We are fitting the equipment with automated monitoring equipment so the role involves running reports of the data, assessing the results and taking action e.g. ordering new equipment, ordering parts for replacement etc.

This is a complete change of responsibilities. Maintenance workers will be in an office at the top of the factory, using computers to run their reports and using their analytical ability to decide which equipment is failing and proactively taking action before it fails. Let's break this into smaller changes. First, when the maintenance workers arrive for work, instead of putting on overalls and walking onto the floor of the factory they have to go upstairs to the office instead. We need to make this a new habit. Instead of inputting data, we need them to run a report first thing in the morning, another new habit. These are things that a breakdown chart can help us to identify.



Technique number two is to adopt going upstairs to the office and running the report as new habits. I like the work of BJ Frogg (<http://tedxtalks.ted.com/video/Forget-big-change-start-with-a>) who has identified that tiny habits are easier to achieve than big changes and that changes are more likely to happen if we tie them to things we were going to do anyway.

So going to the office becomes the habit that the maintenance workers adopt as soon as they arrive for work. It becomes part of the habit of parking the car, walking to the factory, going through security etc. Running the report becomes a new habit as soon as they sit down in front of their computers. It becomes the new norm and from that other aspects of their new role can be built up until they have become maintenance analysts and not maintenance operatives.

4. Time to talk is essential – simplify existing ways of working to create time for change

It takes time to reset the mind and people need time to talk their way into new ways of working so we have to give them the time to talk, the permission to explore their ideas and people to talk to.

The only problem is, there is no time. Everyone is already too busy. One of the most common activities I am asked for at the start of change programmes is creating the time for change. For me this starts with a recognition that when we ask people to participate in change we are doubling their workload:

Run the
business

Change the
business

We are asking them to spread their work between 'Run the Business' and 'Change the Business'. We have to get the balance right because it is 'Run the Business' that is the day job, it is what customers expect from us and it is what generates the revenue to pay for any changes to our business. In my experience the only way to really create enough time to make change happen is to start a change initiative with a reduction in 'Run the Business'. This means getting rid of anything that is 'nice to have' or things that we have always done but don't really add value anymore. The most common areas that contribute a lot of time are meetings and reports as they take time to attend and to create/read which could be better spent on creating new ways of working. There has to be a willingness by all those affected to genuinely assess the value of current ways of working and cut out all activities that are not essential. Without this rigorous approach change will remain an idea but not a reality.

5. Line managers – their approval is vital

Too often in change initiatives, change comes top down from the senior management team. There are lots of announcements and lots of explanations of the organisational benefits of the change and why the change is so important for the future of the organisation. This is important, but it doesn't always connect at the human level.

We must find ways of motivating our middle management layer because from their point of view everything is stacked in favour of maintaining the status quo. They were promoted because of their ability to manage the current ways of working. They built up their experience and knowledge in the current ways of working. They have coached staff, performance appraised staff and helped to create the current ways of working. New ways of working pose a threat to their abilities. What if they struggle to work in new ways? Will their staff respect them less? Will they look stupid?

These are all valid concerns and simply telling these managers that the change is the right thing for the organisation isn't enough. We have to help them find their own rationale for the change. We have to help them discover the personal benefits of learning new skills and doing things in more up to date ways. This might be career development benefits, this might include getting rid of existing problems that they struggle to manage. In my experience, a lot of this discovery has to be achieved one on one, as line managers do not want to be exposed as being concerned or hesitant about the change. However, if we do not engage them then they are a powerful resisting force. As one of my clients once described this layer of management, they are a 'layer of clay' through which ideas and information find it difficult to permeate.

Conclusion

This is obviously a personal view of change, built from my own experiences of the changes I am involved in. With each new change I find my ideas evolving, and I am learning new techniques all the time so keep in touch to hear my latest lessons learned via linkedin and my newsletters.



Melanie Franklin has a track record of excellence in project, programme and portfolio planning and delivery. In recent years she has focused on helping organisations move from waterfall to agile project management approaches in response to the increasing need to deliver projects on a shorter timescale.

Creating agile environments has grown in importance in recent years, and many executives are driving this adoption as they become aware of the benefits of agile thinking in responding to fast moving changes in the international business environment.

She is a respected author of 8 text books about project and change management. Her most recent book, 'Agile Change Management' proposed an approach to managing change initiatives that applies the principles of agile project management. This ensures that the exact deliverables from a change initiative can evolve in response to customer, regulator and market demand, project deadlines are still respected.

Melanie believes in authentic leadership, therefore, as well as using her training skills to develop the skills and knowledge of attendees on her courses, she also ensures she attends training to build her own skill set. Melanie is an accredited trainer in AgilePM and is a Certified Scrum Master and LeanKanban Practitioner. She is also an accredited trainer in Change Management, an examiner for the APMG Change Management Foundation and Practitioner qualifications and the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK.

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