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Lessons learned from creating a change management framework

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Introduction

Managing change effectively continues to be a significant issue for organisations, many of whom are concerned that innovations and ideas for growing the business do not gain full adoption and struggle to realise the benefits expected. The desire to improve this situation is articulated as a desire to *'create a capability for managing change'* or as a need *'to make change the new norm'*.

A recurring theme of my change management consultancy work is the request to build a Change Management Framework, which outlines how new ideas can be implemented in a similar way each time, using an agreed set of steps that increase the likelihood of benefits being realised. This document outlines the key lessons that I have experienced from the scoping, design and development of a number of these frameworks.

What is a Change Management Framework?

A Change Management Framework is the approach that an organisation will use to manage change initiatives and often includes a change management lifecycle and change management toolkits.

The lifecycle model identifies each activity and decision that a new idea will pass through from its initial discovery until it has been implemented and embedded as the new 'norm'. The lifecycle model describes the information that is needed to support each of these steps and often groups this information into a number of suggested documents. Toolkits often include templates of these documents along with guidance on how to complete them, checklists to ensure their completeness and other guidance to increase understanding of how the framework is to be used.

Why is it called a Framework?

Framework is my term, which is a synonym for change management approach, business transformation strategy, business change process or structure. I try to avoid terms including methodology, method or plan. This is because many people are uncomfortable with the idea that there is simple 'recipe' that if followed will lead to new ideas becoming the new business as usual.

For this reason, many people have become uncomfortable with the term 'change management' as they believe that change cannot be subject to management and control. They believe that change evolves and is a product of an emotional journey that individuals experience.

Change Management is becoming recognised as a professional management discipline, which is increasing the debate about how to manage change better. Some of these conversations critique certain terms and seek to find better ways of describing what we are trying to achieve. As a result I have noticed that some of my clients don't refer to Change Managers, but instead to Change Leaders and they talk about business change or business transformation instead of change management.



What is the purpose of Change Management Framework?

The framework provides a suggested set of steps, processes and activities that takes an idea for something new or different through to its adoption as a new product or service.

It is designed to provide guidance for three levels of responsibility:

- **Leading/Managing the initiative:** this is the main group that uses the framework. They are responsible for defining, planning and resourcing what needs to be done and allocating this work to others
- **Involved in the initiative:** people at this level can use the framework so that they can appreciate how their work contributes to the overall effort, and what other activities are taking place and how they all fit together
- **Sponsors of the initiative:** The framework can help sponsors to understand what work should be undertaken and when, as well as identifying the decisions and approvals they should expect to undertake and where these fit in the overall lifecycle of the change initiative.

The existence of a change management framework can support the work of those involved in audit and quality management. Auditors can use the framework as a guide to assess if a change is being managed appropriately and it can form part of the quality management system of an organisation.

I have learnt to ask some key questions about what triggered the desire to have a change framework so that I can scope my work appropriately. Sometimes the purpose of the change framework is to support a specific transformational change or organisation-wide restructuring. At other times, it is a wider strategic need to improve how managers and staff react to new systems and processes that drives the need to define how change is managed. Increasingly I am asked by consultancies to help build their approach to change because they recognise that helping their customers manage change is a valuable service that they can cross sell alongside their main products and services

What are the benefits of a Change Management Framework?

A core benefit of having a change framework is to inspire all those involved in the change that they can be successful. The existence of a change framework can help to demystify the process of change and encourage those who would not normally participate to get involved. Some of the specific benefits include:

- **Defines** the journey from idea to successful change, enabling this to be shared and creating consensus on how best to approach the work
- **Reassures** customers, suppliers and regulators that disruption to '*business as usual*' will be formally managed and not undertaken lightly
- **Creates** an environment where change is normal and is as well defined and supported as other business activities
- **Provides** the foundation for developing an internal capability in planning, managing and implementing change
- **Enables** everyone to understand their role in making change a reality

Clarifying the scope of a Change Management Framework?

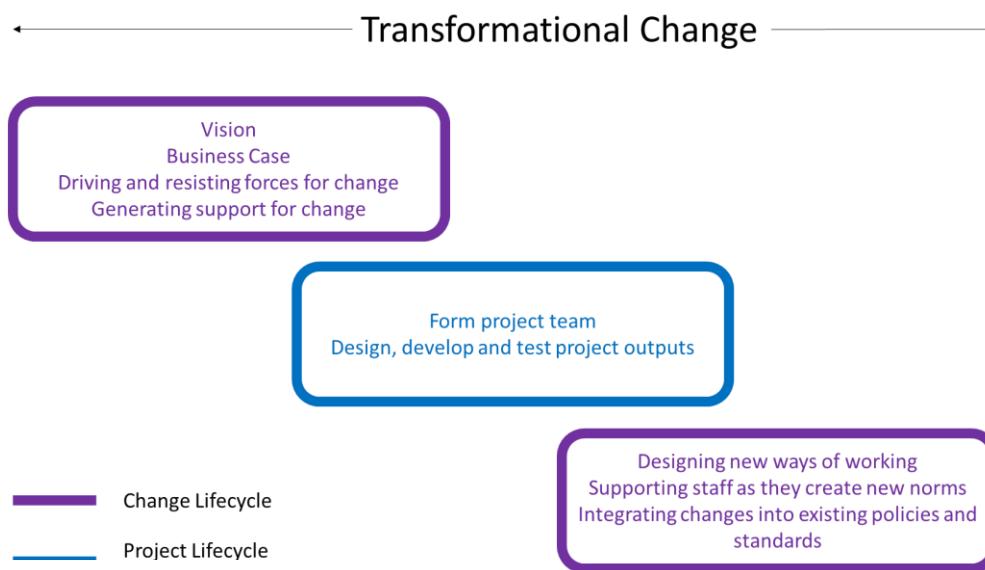
I use the benefits described above to generate a discussion with my client about what they hope to achieve by building a change management framework. I have learnt that this conversation has a significant impact on the scope of what needs to be included. I have also learnt that it is important to survey the views of different roles within the organisation, in addition to the main sponsor for the work

For example, it is always worth asking the head of quality management for their ideas, as it is often necessary to align the steps in the change framework to any existing quality management system. To be effective, the change management framework should not duplicate existing Standard Operating Procedures, but should incorporate them into the change management activities. Also, the quality management system is likely to have an escalation route for issues and concerns about how things are managed which can be usefully incorporated into the framework.

It is useful to involve Human Resources when developing the change framework as they may have insight into the responsibilities or performance measures appropriate for those leading and managing change. It is also important to reflect the responsibilities for change into existing line management roles, as this may impact perceptions of seniority, management grades and pay scales.

Consulting with any learning and development function is also a good idea so you can see how the responsibilities for leading change described in the change framework align with existing leadership development programmes.

It is important to discover if the organisation already has a project management method or approach as this will need to be referenced in the change management framework. Change triggers projects, but equally, projects trigger change.



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Where the change framework starts and ends in relation to any project management methodology will impact its scope, and as many staff are likely to have been trained in and are already using the project methodology, its content must be referenced in the change framework.

Who owns the Change Management Framework?

There is little commonality between organisations about who owns the framework, as it is affected by the perceived importance of doing organisational change well.

In some organisations I am working directly with the Chief Executive or equivalent as they have decided that a capability for implementing change is a significant competitive advantages and needs the most senior level of sponsorship to convey its importance.








One CEO asked me to create a change management process before she embarked on a re-structuring of her organisation so that when she discussed her ideas with her board she could describe how she wanted to achieve the change along with what changes she wanted to implement.

A university vice-chancellor asked me to create a change management approach because following the approval of the universities 5 year strategic plan, he was worried about his staff feeling overwhelmed by change.

An HR director has asked to create a change management competency model, lifecycle model and change management toolkit in response to a strategic objective for increasing the capability for change. In this case, HR were using the materials as the basis of a change leadership development programme.

I think the most important issue about ownership is that it becomes devolved as soon as possible, so that all those involved in change including project managers and line managers who are leading change in their area of the business feel that the framework is one of their tools for success.

What are the core elements?

	Process model – outlines the activities that are required for change management and the order in which they are usually completed
	Templates – a pre-agreed format with suggested content for the most frequently used management information about the change
	Roles and responsibilities – outline job descriptions for planning, managing, implementing and sponsoring change
	Questionnaires – questions and factors to consider when assessing progress and/or, the suitability of individuals for specific roles
	Checklists – a comprehensive list of activities, information and responsibilities used to check the quality and progress of the change activities
	Agendas – structure, format, timing and suggested contents for meetings and workshops to ensure desired outcome is achieved
	FAQs – providing answers to frequently asked questions so that all participants can describe the change process in a consistent manner

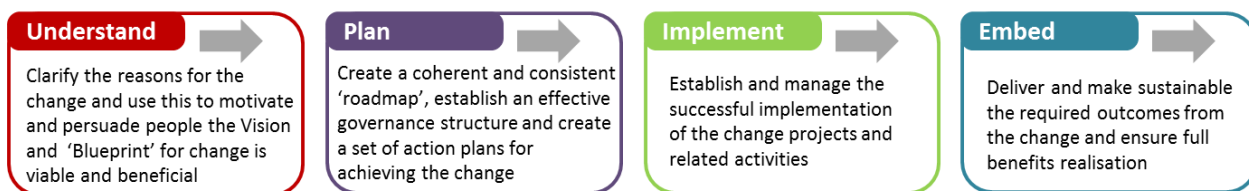
What are the important steps in managing change?

There are lots of different models of organisational change, which outline the most important steps that move the change from initial idea to embedded change. For example, John Kotter published his famous 8 step model in 1996 and Kurt Lewin created his 3 step model in the 1940s and William Bridges contributed his 3 step model of transitioning to new ways of working in the 1990s.

All of these different models demonstrate that there is no one way to lead a change initiative. The frameworks I create for my clients are influenced by these ideas, affected by the culture, types of change and level of change management skills and experience that exist within the organisation.

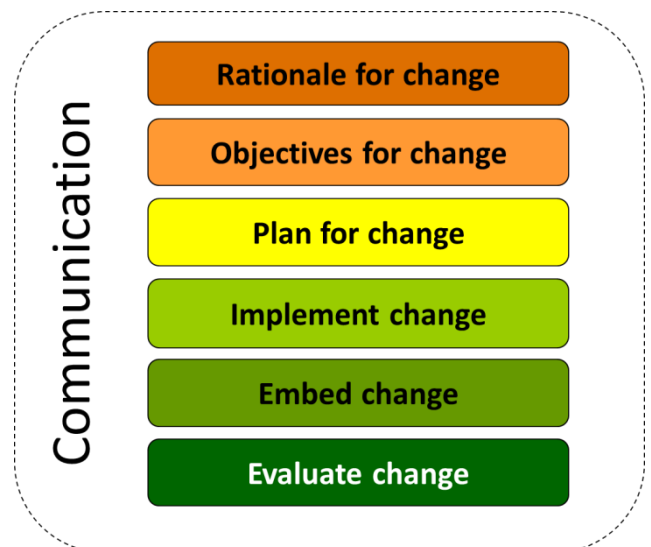
Example 1.

This is a straightforward linear model where each step builds on the preceding model. In the full version of this framework there is a detailed explanation of the expected outputs at completion of each step, the quality criteria that these outputs (documents and decisions) must meet and a guide on who is responsible for each output. Where the outputs are documents, templates are provided, and where the outputs are the completion of specific activities (e.g. meetings or workshops) suggested agendas have been created.



Example 2.

In this example, the client wanted to emphasise the importance of on-going communication between those who originate change and those who are impacted by it. The client also wanted to ensure that the last step specifically addressed the measurement of the benefits resulting from the change, which is linked to the rationale for change which includes a detailed business case and description of the expected benefits.



Conclusion

When something is important, we tend to take it seriously. This is exactly what is happening with change management. Organisations recognise that as the pace of change continues to increase, those that are able to excel in implementing and embedding new ideas have a competitive advantage.

For this reason, the demand for an organisation wide, intuitive approach to managing change will continue to grow. The growth in the demand for effective change management mirrors that of the growth of project management which began twenty years ago. Then, project management was seen as something carried out by specialists, but has developed to be a recognised and expected management skill. Change management appears to be taking a similar direction, with growth in training and professional qualifications in change management and the development of in-house approaches to managing change.

If you are considering building your own change framework, do your research, and review the many models, theories and techniques that exist for leading people from their existing situation to a new, and hopefully better business environment.

About the Author

Melanie is an inspirational expert in the field of Agile and Change Management theory and practice. In addition to her role as Chair of the Change Management Institute (UK), she has authored 10 books, provides international consulting and delivers accredited training courses. From leadership to projects and change, her insight helps those who want to make a difference. She constantly seeks ways to help individuals and organisations to be more efficient through use of proven tools and techniques.



Built on a photographic memory, Melanie delivers concentrated power and energy that drives projects further and faster than before. Combined with 20+ years of experience, you only need a small engagement to make a massive difference.