



**AGILE CHANGE**  
*management limited*

# How can I get a change management role?

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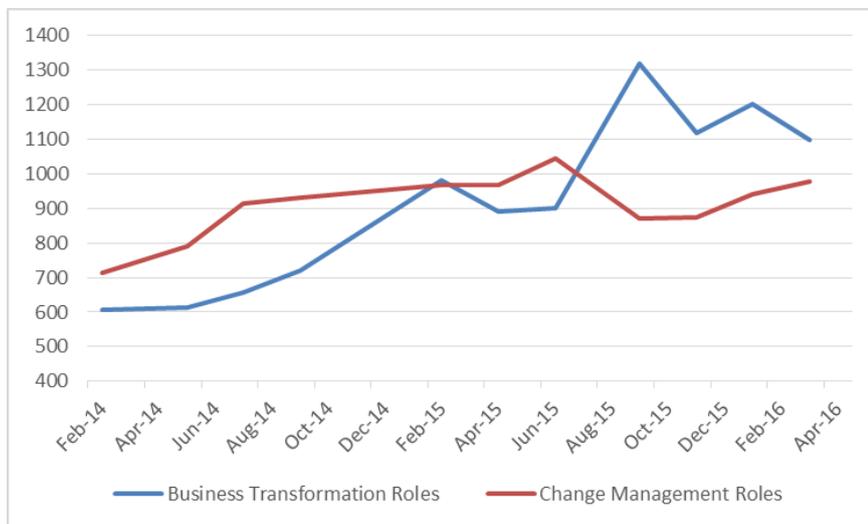


## Introduction

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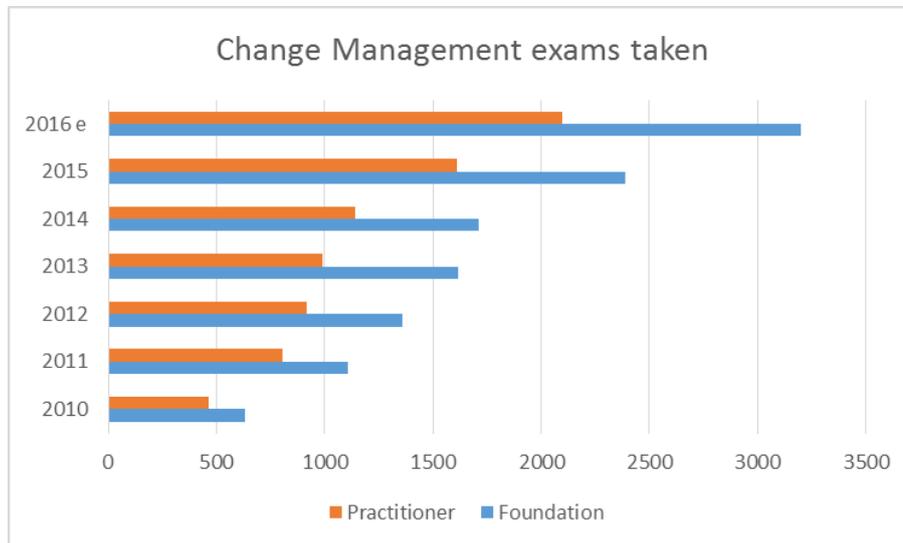
### Change management is a growing discipline

Opportunities for those able to lead an initiative through both project creation and adoption/implementation continue to grow. The number of transformation roles on offer via the UK's market leading job board is up 22% from the start of the year (jobs offered on UK's largest job board). These roles are senior level and are paying rates commensurate with their strategic contribution so upwards of £550 per day.



Not everyone is going to be operating at this strategic level, but those with a project or programme management background who can walk into a job of their choosing understand change management. So change management knowledge is becoming the number one differentiator for successful job hunting for project managers.

No surprise therefore that the number of people with a formal change management qualification is also growing – these are the figures from APMG International who offer the UK’s leading change qualification, the Change Management Practitioner course:



## What is the number one skill employers are looking for?

Recruitment agents tell me that the easiest way to convince a potential employer of your value is to talk them through the change lifecycle and what you would include as core activities in your change management plan.

Whilst this might appear entry level information, many of them tell me how surprised they are that so called ‘change professionals’ cannot clearly explain what they would do if they were given the job. Many organisations are just waking up to the need to manage change as carefully and consistently as they manage the creation of the new processes, products and services that trigger the need for change. Therefore, when they are employing a Change Manager or Business Transformation Manager, they are genuinely searching out someone with a strong understanding of what good change management practice looks like and how to create it for their organisation.

In my experience, this also involves an explanation of the benefits and risks of integrating change management with project management, and being able to carefully explain the differences between project management (creation) and change management (implementation).

Recruiters are told to find people who are skilled and qualified Change Managers. Organisations do not want to interview ‘accidental’ Change Managers who have stumbled across their own success in change but without any guarantee that they can replicate it in another organisation.

This backs up my own consulting experience, where I have a stream of organisations who contact me specifically to develop their change management methodology and toolkit. It is only when they have this core information in place that they can start to build their skills and create internal training programmes to develop their staff.

## What else do employers need from me?

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Stakeholder engagement is an often requested skill set. However, this is such a wide subject it is worth hearing what organisations mean by it. Conversations with recruiters identify that stakeholder engagement means several things:

- Explaining why the change is important
- Facilitating stakeholders so that change becomes their idea
- Being able to communicate change in different ways for different cultural situations

### **Explaining why the change is important**

There is a need to take change to those impacted by it, and help them to discover its benefits and to sign post why the organisation cannot continue to work as it has always done. This communication effort needs a lot of coordination so planning and organising are key skills. However, there is a great deal of need for empathy, because the most effective communicators can appreciate why those affected cannot see the need for change. Change managers need to be able to walk in others shoes, to appreciate the level of disruption the change will cause, and to understand the advantages of the existing ways of working. Those who fail at this aspect of stakeholder engagement talk about the change as if it were the only thing to consider. Change is never as simple as replacing something that doesn't work with something that does. There is always something positive about the existing ways of working that staff appreciate and are unwilling to give up. Without understanding this any communication is just a lecture on the benefits. Without acknowledging the losses associated with giving up existing practices and procedures the situation can quickly become confrontational. A skilled Change Manager avoids this through empathetic appreciation of what is being lost whilst at the same time skilfully pointing out the benefits and what can be gained from the change.

### **Facilitating stakeholders so that change becomes their idea**

Change cannot be done to people. A skilled Change Manager spends their time signposting the benefits and opportunities of the change until they have created an atmosphere which is exciting and those impacted want to become a part of. So effective change management is about 'doing things', it's about talking, influencing, persuading and motivating.

How do we get others to think that the change is their idea? We ask lots of questions about how things work currently, and we help them to identify the most useful improvements. We then make the links between the improvements they are seeking and the change that we are responsible for. Simple! Well, it is simple if you are a listener, because those affected by change nearly always have the best ideas for getting the most from the change and applying it in the most sensible way. All we have to do is give them the opportunity to talk and think by providing networking events, one to one meetings, workshops to design the details of the change and chances to experiment to improve on their initial ideas.

### **Being able to communicate change in different ways for different cultural situations**

Change is a people process, which means it is different for every situation. Rigid methodologies which set out all the actions that must be taken without regard for how people react to these tasks will fail. Recruiters tell me that once the organisation has discovered that a candidate knows the change lifecycle and can describe all the activities needed to manage change, their number one area of interest is 'how will it work here?'

The starting point for this conversation is to have a simple explanation of what culture means. Knowing that it is comprised of unspoken assumptions, standard practices and visible indicators of how seniority works, how decisions are taken and what the organisation thinks is important is a good starting point. For me, a cultural change question always sorts out those who have invested in formal change management training and those who have not. A blustering, long winded description of 'culture is the way we do things around here' indicates an 'accidental' Change Manager. A clear outline of the components of culture and how each one will be impacted by the change we are discussing tells me I am talking to a fellow change professional.

The organisation wants to hear how the candidate has adapted what they do to different situations, and to hear about these different situations, so they can get an appreciation of what challenges the candidate has faced in the past. Obviously a really good candidate will ask what the organisation is most worried about and tailor their answer to meet the need. In my experience, key situations to adapt to are:

- **Where change has failed before** – so there is a backlog of bad feeling, wasted effort and a great deal of hesitancy to start again. So the Change Manager is going to have to work a lot harder in this situation to get people on board, and to create real belief in the possibilities that the change offers. Effectively what they are going to have to do is concentrate on the 'human business case' i.e. demonstrating that the personal benefits of participating in the change outweigh the costs of the additional effort and hard work involved.
- **When change is organisation wide** - it has not originated in the country or department that is being changed, so resentment about 'change being done to us' is high. Being able to understand how much of the change can be 'localised' and therefore, how much opportunity there is to shape the change is key to success in this situation. If the answer is 'not much' then can the Change Manager expand the scope of the change so that it does include areas that need improvement and would have support from those affected.

### How do you get a change management role?

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So we know this is a growing management discipline and if you have read this far, it is because you want to be a part of it. The simple steps for improving your job prospects are:

- Get trained – make sure you do have a solid understanding of the theories and models of change. Change management is professionalising and increasingly the people hiring you are well versed in the formal approaches to change and want to hear how you have built up your own knowledge.
- Formalise your association with the change management discipline – the Change Management Institute is the professional body for Change Managers so make sure you are a member and this is clearly shown on your CV.
- Go through your past initiatives and identify several situations for each one where you had to persuade those affected to become involved in making the change happen. Think back to how you approached them, what worked and what didn't work so you have examples to illustrate your 'people skills'.

Update your CV so that you don't just talk about projects you have been involved in, but describe them in terms of the impact that they have had. How many people were affected? Were they all co-located or did you work across several offices or different countries? How did you communicate with people? What were your biggest challenges and how did you overcome them? Don't make me guess if you achieved things and don't say what the project or initiative achieved, tell me what you did because it's you we are looking to employ.

**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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