



**AGILE CHANGE**  
*management limited*

# Change Management needs to speed up

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# Contents

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<b>Introduction</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Why managing change needs to go faster</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Sources of pressure to speed up</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Ideas for how we can speed up change management</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Organisational impacts of faster change management</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>7</b>

## Introduction

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I feel a little sad writing this paper, because I know that the profession I love is still in its infancy, and yet I am making the case for a seismic shift in the way Change Practitioners approach change management.

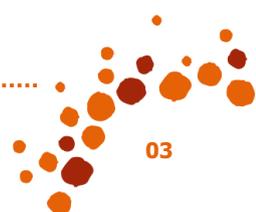
Change management is one of the newest and oldest management disciplines. It is old because humans have always had to adapt and change to survive, and changes at work are no different to any other aspect of our lives. However, codifying how to manage change initiatives and lead the transformations of businesses has only been formally defined as a set of management activities in the last decade. Indicators of our newness include:

- The Change Management Institute was formed in 2005 in Australia and the Association of Change Management Professionals followed in 2011.
- Recognition of the importance of change management by other professional bodies is only just getting started, with discussions but no formal alliances established.
- The definition of what great change management looks like is only just starting to become something that organisations judge themselves against but there is little in the way of formal maturity models.
- The creation of change management teams and the appointment of senior managers directly responsible for leading change initiatives is increasing at a fast pace, but these roles have only formally existed, in the UK at least, for the last few years.

There is a lot more work to do to gain the necessary recognition that effective change doesn't happen on its own. It needs to be defined, guided and encouraged. The change management profession needs to become a lot better at explaining what change management is and what it involves:

- We need to be clear about the responsibilities and competencies associated with leading, managing and participating in change.
- There needs to be broader agreement on the relationship between project management and change management.

However, whilst all this is taking place, I think change management faces the threat of being overtaken by events. Whilst many of us have persuaded organisations to take the implementation and adoption of new ideas as seriously as they take the creation of them, we risk becoming a blockage because we are not moving fast enough.



### Why managing change needs to go faster

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As the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute in the UK, I talk about change management to nearly everyone I meet, and I listen to their responses very carefully. I am always 'taking the temperature' of my profession and in the last few months I have been hearing some negative commentary.

The problem is that in a world of frequent delivery of small increments of the overall change, the amount of change delivered at any one point might be smaller but those impacted have to alter how they work to accommodate these increments more regularly. We hear about DevOps which is a way for IT to organise itself so that it creates a 'production line' of changes to infrastructure, applications, information and security, all of which those in the business have to adapt to.

The first indicator of how change management might need to change is summed up from this quote: "10 years ago we always used to blame IT for being late, failing to deliver on the agreed date. Now it's virtually the opposite, with IT complaining that the business isn't ready to take what they have delivered."

Whilst many organisations are still at the beginning of their adoption of Agile practices, I think there is enough progress from some of the leading organisations to identify the potential impact on how we scope and manage change. Essentially, if the creation of the tangible elements of change: systems; data; automated processes becomes a cycle of continuous improvement, the emotional and psychological adoption of change will need to follow suit.

### Sources of pressure to speed up

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The pace of change has been increasing for many years, but in 2017 I think this pressure arises from two key areas:

1. Technology – we continue to incorporate integrated systems and automation into more and more tasks, and the introduction of Artificial Intelligence driven systems and robotics is going to have as much of a seismic impact as the introduction of the internet. Whilst this is the big picture, at a micro level, change management is driven by technology through a simple mantra: If I can describe it, I can streamline it, if I can streamline it I can take out manual intervention. If I can take our manual intervention I can automate it.
2. The age of uncertainty – whenever humans are uncertain, they react. By doing something, we perceive ourselves to be coping, even if what we are doing is not

well thought through. In our current environment of political and economic uncertainty it is harder to be sure of the right strategy. Organisations are impacted by short termism, with quick decisions being valued and seen as productive. These quick decisions have a short shelf life, quickly replaced by the next idea, breeding an unstoppable amount of change.

### Ideas for how we can speed up change management

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To speed up our ability to manage change, we need to build a community of local change agents. Centralised change has to be forced through the management layers of an organisation, taking time to communicate and being subject to misinterpretation at each step. If we want a faster reaction, we have to empower staff to make the changes for themselves.

Our approach needs to be based on the idea of 'many hands make light work'. This means building an organisation wide capability for change, equipping all staff with the knowledge, skills and techniques for managing change.

Aligned to this is the need for an organisation wide approach for change, so that the speed of local implementation of change is not hampered by the need to reinvent the wheel each time.

As Change Practitioners, we have to recognise how most people react to change:

- Thought 1 – how can I get out of making this change and stick to what I am doing now?
- Thought 2 – if I am going to make these changes, how can I fit them in alongside everything else I am supposed to be doing?
- Thought 3 – I meant to try that new approach today but I was just too busy, how can I stick to my agreement to change my ways of working?

Central creation of guidance for how to identify, plan and implement change is partnered with checklists and templates that individuals can apply to their own situation.

### Organisational impacts of faster change management

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I think that speeding up change management generates three impacts for human resource management:

1. Competencies

- 2. Role descriptions
- 3. Performance management

## 1. Competencies

We need to introduce new skills and competencies which are essential in increasing the speed of adoption of change within the business.

One of the key skills is the ability to assimilate a number of changes, understanding how they might fit together, where they may conflict with each other and to assess their overall impact on business processes, efficiency, customer service, security, profitability and reputation.

It involves an ability to make connections that are not there already, to see patterns that might emerge and to generate economies of scale by flexing the order in which different changes are applied.

Another new competency is horizon scanning, which encourages everyone to look ahead and to look outside of their direct area of responsibility to identify other aspects of change that are emerging. These are still just potential ideas but by being able to see ahead to what might happen, it increases the sense of certainty which builds confidence in making changes today.

Finally, the skill of resilience must not be overlooked. Resilience is defined as the ability to cope with change. We need to train, coach and encourage the development of this skill in all employees. Resilience is not just a senior management skill. In an age of continuous change, those who can cope are the ones who will last the course.

## 2. Role descriptions

If we want everyone to take part in making change happen, then we have to recognise this responsibility in their job descriptions. Some of the most effective organisations I work for are those who specifically recognise that everyone, irrespective of their management grade or their level of experience has to balance doing their existing job whilst participating in improving their job.

Improvement can include having ideas for change, taking part in creating new ways of working, training others in how to make changes. However, unless this is recognised as a formal part of the job, where is the incentive to take part? When the pressure is on, and there are deadlines to be met in the 'day job' why should anyone also give up their time to projects and change initiatives if this is not in their job description?

### 3. Performance management

Similarly to the role description, what is measured is what people pay attention to, so if we are going to expand the responsibility for change to everyone in the organisation, then the performance metrics against which their performance is measured must change.

Examples of relevant performance metrics that I have seen organisations adopt with positive results include:

- Identifying at least 2 new improvements relevant to your role per year
- Participating in at least one change initiative or improvement project per year
- Transferring your specialist knowledge to at least one colleague, to build capacity to assist you when you are involved in a change initiative

### Conclusion

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Change management as a profession and as a practice must continue to evolve. It is clear from our customers i.e. those who have to cope with change, that change must be made smaller and easier to digest. If the pace of change continues to speed up, then the pace of change management must do so as well.

