Knowledge for your next job

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Executive Summary

From December to March people attending my courses are looking for new contracts or getting ready to change jobs. I am asked for advice on what is happening in the job market and often invite trusted recruitment agents to meet my course attendees at lunch times. As a **result,** I thought you might like this guide to what you need to know to get a new job.

My guidance is based on the types of projects and change initiatives that are most prevalent at the start of this year and the knowledge and skills you need to get a job on one of them.

Initiative 1 – Building the skills for change

A very common initiative is building more skills for managing change. The initiative is often commissioned by those running the PMO which in this case means Portfolio Management Office. This means the PMO has a strategic remit and is not just tracking the progress of individual projects and programmes.

Not only is this a common project right now but the reasons why it is needed are very similar irrespective of the industry it is taking place in:
1. We are expecting such a high volume of change this year that we need the skills to be able to cope.
2. Many of the programmes and projects we are planning for this year are more strategic (I.e. more important and watched more closely by senior management) so we need the skills to make sure we can deliver them effectively.

The scope of these initiatives is broadly similar:
- Build a common understanding of what we mean by change management
- Define all the activities for implementing and embedding project deliverables
- Design templates, checklists and guidance material to be owned by the PMO which will become a centre of excellence for change
- Identify how Project Managers, Programme Managers, Business Analysts, Change Champions from the business, Risk Managers and Benefits Managers will contribute to managing change.

Provide sponsor training to move sponsors from overseeing the creation of project deliverables to driving their adoption.

Knowledge

One of the key pieces of knowledge you need for this initiative is an excellent understanding of all the different theories and models typically associated with managing change. This is for two reasons:

1. You need this knowledge to be able to design the change management framework that your organisation is going to follow.
2. You must be able to recognise the origin of the different approaches that consultancies and other colleagues will try to apply to this work.

This will give you the confidence know what you are doing is right and be able to explain it credibly by aligning it back to the most well-known theories. Therefore I think that the APMG Change Management Practitioner qualification is so useful, because it gives you an excellent grounding in all of this knowledge. I am not alone in my views.

The Change Management Institute endorses this qualification because it addresses all elements of the institute's Body **o**f Knowledge. Recruitment agents (driven by their clients) are asking for this qualification as one of the first filters on job applications so they don't waste time interviewing people who don't even know the basics.

Another area of knowledge so important to this initiative is project management methods, including Waterfall and Agile approaches. This is because one of the main elements of this initiative is bringing together the existing project management method (which is already well defined in most organisations) with change management to create an integrated project delivery and adoption approach.

Skills

The key skill-set you need for this type of work is excellent stakeholder engagement skills. There is still a lot of hard work to do with many areas of the business to convince them of the value of Change Management.

You will need to persuade many people who have a limited knowledge of what change management involves of its benefits whilst explaining how it can be achieved practically alongside business as usual responsibilities.

Initiative 2 – Creating added value

Another very common initiative involves the re-imagining of roles to take advantage of the opportunities from automation. So many directors are sponsoring this type of transformation, because of the availability of machine learning and the desire for cost efficiencies.

Underpinning this work is a belief that if the organisation continues to employ expensive human beings then we have to use them for higher value work. Machine leaning is increasingly applied to calculations, managing workflow and the automatic completion of transactions. To justify the

employment of humans they must add value by developing customer relationships, promoting the organisation/brand and developing ideas for new products and services.

This initiative results in the transformation of existing roles, away from transaction processing to relationship building and creativity. This generates large amounts of fear amongst those directly affected and those who are not yet affected by worry that they will be in the future.

Knowledge

Knowledge of the causes of resistance to change and how to address them is going to be to your success in this initiative. A detailed appreciation of why we find changes to our roles so threatening and the likely reaction that people have will help you to identify the myriad of actions and messages needed to provide certainty and reassurance.

Understanding the theories relating to influencing and persuading are key, because for this transformation to be successful, people have to feel sufficiently secure and supported that they are prepared to take a leap into a new role.

Recognising the needs of different personality types, learning styles, levels of willingness to change and the factors that motivate people are essential in planning a strategy to encourage people to work in new ways.

Skills

The most important skill needed for this work is empathy. The ability to see things from someone else's perspective and to understand and sometimes predict the emotional response that it triggers.

You will also need to be able to draw together multiple changes into a cohesive picture so that those affected by change can understand the total impact on their role. After all they are often affected simultaneously by multiple changes from different initiatives. Whilst the different initiatives are aligned strategically to create the desired transformation those affected need the support of someone who can put into practical terms what the effects of all this change really means for their future.

Initiative 3 – Cultural transformation

Finally, continuing from last year is the demand to develop new approaches to work, involving digital transformations and adoption of Agile working although this remit remains broad and undefined as Agile is so open to interpretation.

In the board room, this type of initiative meets the demand to be more responsive to customers and the threats from industry disruptors as well as the desire to get things into the market faster. Irrespective of the industry, I meet so many clients who want a wholesale transformation of their culture to be more flexible, more innovative and faster to market.

The biggest challenge on working on this type of change is clarifying the scope and making sure that this is clear to all those affected. I am working with several organisations who have launched digital transformation initiatives which involve a mix of IT projects (introducing collaborative platforms) along with facilities projects (hot desking and collaborative workspaces) and HR projects (flexible working patterns) and operations projects (lean process improvement).

For those impacted it can feel that the organisation doesn't really know what it wants, so aligning this back to strategic objectives and creating a view that all the elements knit together into a cohesive story is important for morale and for buy-in.

Knowledge

This initiative relies on the adoption of an agile/entrepreneurial culture. To be useful I think you need an excellent grounding in all of the different Agile methods that exist, so that you can form your own opinion of what is needed. In my experience, there is too little detailed understanding of what is meant by the digital/agile culture, so have a well-informed opinion rather than just an opinion based on assumptions and little knowledge is essential.

Over the past few years I have taken numerous courses in each of the Agile methods. I have formed the opinion that the work done by the Agile Business Consortium in defining its AgilePM® model is probably the most helpful, because it encourages experimentation and innovation whilst offering the structure and governance that many organisations still desire. Once you know AgilePM it is easy to see how other Agile approaches complement it and align to it, which enables you to take the best from different approaches.

You will also be asked about best practice methods in cultural change so make sure you have the fundamental knowledge of the theories and models covered by the APMG Change Practitioner course I talked about earlier in this document.

Skills

This initiative is a cultural change, so patience is a key skill as moves towards the new beliefs that underpin the culture will happen slowly. I think horizon scanning is an important skill, looking outside the organisation and bringing in relevant information about how other organisations are adapting will provide useful fuel to power this type of transformation.

Conclusion

There are a myriad of different change initiatives happening at the moment, but hopefully this has given you a flavour of what is on offer, and some background to the knowledge and skills that will help you come across as well informed and well prepared in interviews.

About the author

I have been responsible for the successful delivery of effective change and for creating environments that support transformational change for over twenty years. I have an impressive track record of successful consulting assignments and I am an acknowledged thought leader in Change Management.

I am the Co-Chair of the Change Management Institute UK and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management. I am a talented communicator with a reputation for delivering complex information with humour and passion. I draw on my wealth of practical experience to illustrate concepts and to engage my audience in lively debates on advantages and disadvantages of each approach that I outline.

To access more resources about change management, connect with Melanie on LinkedIn
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