



AGILE CHANGE
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Creating the New Normal

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Introduction

In true “agile change” style, this document represents my current thinking, but it is only version 0.1 and as the weeks and months of 2020 unfold, I will learn more, test out my current assumptions and draw more conclusions.

Many organisations are currently in a “crisis” mode, where they are doing what they can to service their customers and continue their internal improvement programmes. However, as the current lockdowns around the world morph into something new (too early to say they are coming to an end) we need to develop our understanding of the “new” normal.

I think it is becoming apparent that we will not return to a world exactly as we left it. We have learnt new ways of working that we will not want to leave behind, we have restructured to reflect new priorities and we will have to adapt as any loosening of restrictions does not remove the need for social distancing.

This paper reflects the changes that as an individual we are likely to experience, and at a more strategic level considers the factors that will form our new objectives, priorities, and measures of success. I have captured my ideas under two headings:

1. Perspective of the individual – new habits and norms
2. Perspective of the organisation – those we work within and those we work with

Perspective of the individual

My favourite theorists for cultural change are Von Trompennars and Hampden Turner, who talk about the need to establish the tacit, basic assumptions that we all have about why we do what we do, how we do it and what our priorities are. As our new normal will involve new approaches, new behaviours, and new priorities, I think it is helpful to view the challenge through the lens of cultural change.

Before trying to establish the future, define the current working patterns, approaches and techniques. This enables us to understand how big the gap is between now and the future, and how radical the changes might be. This always gives me an understanding of the scale of the transformation, and the challenge of the journey ahead.

I think this is true of how we work now that a life-threatening virus is with us so I have used this list of “old” to “new” assumptions to help me identify the shifts in my thinking and behaviour that I am going to have to make.



Old world	New world
<p>Commute – by plane and by train, leaving my home early in the morning and not returning until late at night. Using my travel time to think, and to create a physical break between my work and my home. I also used my travel time for “administration” tasks that I got out of the way, so they didn’t impact on my home life.</p>	<p>Commute – none, 5m along the hallway to my “home office”, so no separation between work and home. I am missing the adjustment time when I could think what was ahead and plan my approach (morning) and consider my achievements for the day (evening).</p>
<p>Workplace – a lovely training room for workshops and courses in the City of London, with floor to ceiling windows flooding the room with natural light or working on-site with my clients in locations around the world.</p>	<p>Workplace –various locations in my house where I have set up my laptop, left my papers to be read, and my notebooks of ideas I am working on. Currently these are in 3 different locations in my house, but I have a growing realisation I am going to have to get organised, find a fixed space and get it fitted out with everything I need for working day.</p>
<p>Working hours – officially 8am till 6pm but working during my commute the truth was closer to 6.30am till 8.30pm Monday to Friday, and Sunday evenings was always another 3 hours.</p>	<p>Working hours – during the first few weeks of the lockdown my hours have been fluid, sometimes sleeping in, other times working late into the evening and over the weekend. However, it is time to get a structure together otherwise it is impossible for colleagues, clients, and suppliers to know when to contact me. But I cannot do that in isolation from family life, which if my home is my office does intrude. It offers new opportunities (getting to the pharmacy for my father in the middle of the working day) but also offers temptations (DIY instead of writing this paper!).</p>
<p>Work clothes – well worked out routine of formal suits for meetings, and smart casual for workshops and training courses.</p>	<p>Work clothes – again, during the initial weeks of lockdown, like everyone else I have been wearing a mixture of jeans/leggings and T-shirts. However, I am becoming aware that not differentiating between work and home clothes is making it harder to understand when I am “off-duty”. Time to work out a new look for virtual working. The big retailers are there already, offering us smart tops and casual bottoms to suit meetings via Microsoft Teams!</p>



Old world	New world
<p>Community – in my own office I have fantastic colleagues whose energy and enthusiasm pick me up when I am struggling and whose kindness when life is stressful is always reassuring.</p>	<p>Community – family but no-one else during lockdown. As I come out of lock-down, there may be some chances to see colleagues from a distance. But I need to look at putting time aside to catch up with people in a non-work-related situation.</p>
<p>Client contact/stakeholder engagement – I look back and realise to a degree this was effortless as I met people before and after meetings, had “water-cooler” conversations and could meet clients for social events where we could build a relationship that induced trust between us.</p>	<p>Client contact/stakeholder engagement – I need to find ways to get to know people that I have never met face to face. My initial approach is to make sure we have the video on so that we can see each other, read our body language as well as hear the words we say. I am now going further, using my webcam to share visuals of my working environment, including my dog Max and my garden where I relax so that people can get to know the real me.</p>
<p>Sourcing new clients – existing clients introduce my to their customers and suppliers, and I always used to meet people at all the face to face networking events that I went to.</p>	<p>Sourcing new clients – I still get referrals from existing clients, but this needs re-thinking. My initial ideas are to widen the variety and interest areas of the on-line forums that I join so that as a starting point I meet new people.</p>
<p>Initial meetings with new clients – often the initial meetings were over social events so we could “size each other up” and look for common ground. This was followed by ideas sharing and creative discussions from both of us about what they wanted to use my services for and what I could offer.</p>	<p>Initial meetings with new clients – again, this is work in progress, but I suspect a little more structure is needed. For example, a set of questions about their current situation so that I do not miss anything out in my discovery process when is via videoconference. Also, a much clearer examples of what I have done in the past to give them ideas of what is possible, and what might be useful for them.</p>
<p>Appointing new suppliers – face to face meetings, visiting their offices and production facilities to see them “in situ” made it easier to judge if they offered the range of products and services I needed and held the same values – organised work-space, continual innovation, value for money.</p>	<p>Appointing new suppliers – the corollary of meetings with new clients, harder to build trust, which leads to “give and take” on both sides if we have never met. Put greater emphasis on clarity of requirements, define my quality criteria before commissioning work so I reduce the chance that my suppliers have to act as mind readers.</p>



Perspective of the organisation

I hope that the previous section has given you food for thought. As we are all individuals, it is easier to think about this new world from the impact it has on our lives. This gives us a bit of a warm up to get the creativity flowing for how we might re-design the organisations we work for, and to identify how the scope of our existing transformational changes might need to change, or what new change programmes we need to commission.

In this section, I have provided a template so you can consider how much change you need on a scale from a little to a lot, with space to write your own ideas for what needs to be different. I know that many of us are involved in developing new target operating models (work that was already underway or has been commissioned in response to this crisis).

I am working with clients on this type of assignment, so I have used the most common headings from the variety of TOM templates that are in use:

- Processes
- Customers/Suppliers
- People
- IT/Data
- Location



Processes – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p><u>Costs per process</u> Post Covid, every economy will be in crisis, and all organisations will be looking to cut costs. This will create a domino effect and those that will prosper will be those that can cut costs internally and pass these savings to customers.</p> <p>Streamlined processes with no “waste” will dominate, lean approaches will become the norm.</p>			
<p><u>Delivery mechanisms</u> Customers who have more staff working from home and are experiencing changes to working hours will be looking for changes in how they receive services from you.</p> <p>A good example is the need to redesign the financial regulatory requirement for “know your customer” which often involved the face to face presentation of identification documents.</p> <p>Now there is a need to acceptable digital scans of key documents to “prove” the identity of customers.</p>			
<p><u>“At Home” working</u> There will need to be an increase in support for those working from home, including the extension of Health and Safety responsibilities, and the provision of equipment (laptops, phones, tablets, printers, scanners).</p> <p>There will need to be changes to expenses policies to accommodate purchases by individuals of stationery and the need to make provision for their utility bills. Consideration must be given to local tax rules, for example, the UK tax authorities allow some tax relief when using part of the home as an office.</p>			



Processes – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p><u>Remove redundant processes</u> With staff less likely to meet physically on a frequent basis, this is a chance to reset meetings, events, presentations, and reports that don't add value.</p>			
<p><u>Use of scanning and digital signatures</u> Procurement and contract arrangements will need to move online and culturally there will need to be an acceptance of digital signatures in preference to "wet/ink" signatures.</p>			
<p><u>Use of paper and office supplies</u> If less people are physically in offices, there will be a reduction in the amount of stationery required, coupled with an increase in the move to paperless working through screen sharing on virtual tools.</p>			



Customers/Suppliers – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p><u>Who will our customers be?</u> We cannot rely on our existing customers to drive business in the future. As with all crises, there will be winners and losers, so we need to assess our current customer base to work out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will want less of our services? • Who will want to remove us as a supplier (no longer relevant, cannot afford our services)? • Who have changed their business strategies which make our products and services more relevant for them? 			
<p><u>Customer engagement</u> As customers automate many of their processes to accommodate continued virtual working practices, the balance of staff time spent on servicing customers will reduce in favour of the amount of time needed to engage with customers.</p> <p>This engagement is to help customers identify your products and services that meet their needs and to engage with potential new customers.</p> <p>If customers are acquired via digital marketing rather than physical experience (stores and branches) then the human “front-end” of the relationship cycle becomes even more important.</p>			
<p><u>Location for where we sell our services</u> In a virtual, online world, borders become less relevant. If you have local customers, and your business is drawn from a small radius around your physical premises, then this will be negatively impacted by social distancing.</p> <p>However, there is scope to expand your reach past local or national borders and work internationally. Similarly, this means that the reach of your competitors has also grown and</p>			



Customers/Suppliers – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p>those who are fast to exploit these opportunities might be coming into your market soon.</p>			
<p><u>Customer meetings</u> As our external customers make the same changes we are making, increasing their virtual working, they are likely to question the need for face to face meetings, and when they do occur, they might be in locations close to their own homes. This might raise the risk that sensitive and privileged information is discussed in coffee shops.</p> <p>One of the factors to consider is the responsibility of directors to minimise situations in which staff are put at risk of contracting diseases. This might reduce the willingness of businesses that do not have serve the public to have visitors to their offices.</p>			



People – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p><u>Staff skills and competencies</u> Changes in ways of working trigger the need for a re-think of the skills needed to service the re-imagined business. For example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increased need to build skills and confidence in the use of IT to support virtual working. • As the balance of work turns towards engaging customers, greater need for sales and customer service skills. • Leadership development must include the ability to lead virtual teams. 			
<p><u>Organisation design – introduction of cross functional working</u> If staff are not physically co-located and are working more independently, then there is greater opportunity to re-design how people are organised based on where they contribute to end to end processes, rather than the functional teams that they might be in at the moment.</p>			
<p><u>Organisation design – removal of silos</u> Use virtual Teams as task forces to address issues and implement new ideas free from the restrictions of silos that are propagated in the office by the physical layout.</p>			



IT/Data – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p><u>Access to data</u> With less face to face engagement between senior leaders and staff there will be a reduction in the amount of work that junior staff do in presenting information to senior managers.</p> <p>This will be replaced by greater access to online information by senior managers, answering their own queries in “real-time” rather than being presented with out of date information in formal presentations.</p> <p>This drives the need for increased ease of interrogation of existing data and improved presentation of this data – summaries, infographics and graphical representation.</p>			
<p><u>Use of automation and chatbots</u> As a result of redundancies and furloughing of staff, there will be increased demand to re-engineer processes (robotic process automation/RPA and AI) and to do this work at pace.</p>			
<p><u>Use of virtual tools for training events</u> The cost of hosting face to face training, including travel and overnight stays for staff can double or triple the cost of courses.</p> <p>With many successful case studies from courses moving online during the crisis, is this an acceptable cost?</p>			
<p><u>Reports and forms</u> When offices were closed during the crisis, staff had to manage without access to paper based reports and forms.</p> <p>These are more costly than paperless working and less secure so there would need to be a strong reason for returning to a reliance on this style of working.</p>			



Location – Key factors	Incremental changes	Some changes	Significant changes
<p><u>Place of work</u> For those organisations with a “branch network” there is an impact of loss of presence on the high street, which might drive an increase in the digital marketing presence/budget.</p>			
<p><u>Amount and type of business travel</u> With the rise of virtual working, the cost of business travel for face to face meetings and events will be relatively higher than ever before, increasing demand for a strong Business Case to be made.</p>			
<p><u>Physical space in existing locations</u> Will as much desk space be needed, or are we seeing the acceleration of flexible working and using lower percentages of total staff to plan total number of desks required at any one time?</p> <p>The corollary to this is the need for physical space for meetings and training courses, many of which will have moved online.</p> <p>We must also consider the societal impact of the Covid crisis, which may have reduced the appetite of staff to be sat physically close to their colleagues.</p>			

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 Chief Examiner of the Agile Change Agent qualification from the accreditation body, APMG-International. I am also the UK Country Lead Change Management Institute and a respected author of text books and articles on change, project and programme management.

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