



AGILE CHANGE
management limited

Change in the time of Covid

Author

Melanie Franklin

Director

Agile Change Management Limited



Introduction

The following is a description of the points I made during the webinar hosted by the BCS – Chartered Institute of IT – about how the change management profession is changing as a result of the pandemic.

As the webinar provided opportunities for the audience to share their ideas and experiences, these have been included as part of this summary, anonymised to enable the contributors to be free to share their own perspectives.

The structure of the discussion was in 3 parts:

- Where are we now?
- Creating the future of the change management profession:
 - Customer centricity
 - Building capability

Where are we now?

In the most recent past, it has been common for organisations to have a small group of change professionals, operating a centre of excellence or central change function. These change professionals were experienced, trained, and provided guidance on how to lead a change initiative. They were the authors and gate keepers of their organisations change management framework and toolkit and could be loaned out from this central team to support individual change initiatives. The model was a push from the centre onto those project managers, line managers and staff involved in change.



Pre-Covid situation



Several of the group described how in their organisations this approach had created a perception that the approach to change management was under the direction of this central function, so it was the role of change professionals to specify how to do change, rather than the role of those impacted by change to use what we were making available to them. This led to examples of how we had failed to articulate the value and difference that effective change management can make.

During Covid



Another reason that this “push” model has been broken during the pandemic was that many changes were undertaken without following process and governance. The speed of change meant that many decisions and actions were taken autonomously, because the need to put things in place immediately was of critical importance.

The audience contributed their own examples of how much change had been achieved in their own organisations:

"Our narrative pre-Covid was that we were scared of change, but this is something which people feel has really changed."

"Yes, our organization was very proud of getting a lot done very quickly."

"I think a lot of people think that as we have all gone through change we are all change experts..."

Amongst the pride, there was a concern raised about how the level of change can be sustained in the long term.

"I agree that organisations have been stoic but I wonder if the managers "who got the change done" have done it with lasting effect?"

"I think there is a feeling of achievement within my organization but also an awareness this was once in a lifetime and how do we replicate this level of progress?"

"I wonder if staff have complied because of a crisis management system and whether there maybe more resistance once we are post covid and we adjust to the new normal?"

This led a to discussion about how important it is to celebrate the achievements whilst pointing out that they were aided by unique circumstances not applicable to day to day organizational change.

For example, these factors provided an energy for change we do not always experience:

- Sense of urgency, a real feeling that lockdown was coming, and action had to be taken immediately.

- Unified messaging – even governments were supporting our messages about needing to act, all staff were confronted with the story on the nightly news as well as at work.
- Creation of survival anxiety – clear evidence that if action wasn't taken, work could not continue and that our employers would go out of business.

If this is where we are now, I put forward the argument that we need to move to a new "pull" model, to replace the pre-Covid "push" model. In the "push" model, change professionals transfer their knowledge to those impacted by change. This means the onus shifts to these managers and staff impacted by change to use these tools to lead themselves through change.



Post Covid



A "pull" model requires an appetite by those impacted by change to want what change professionals can offer. This requires increasing their consciousness about the value of change management. The change management profession is at a pivot point, where we need to re-market our value proposition to change agents/change champions throughout our organisations.

The future of change management

I put forward the idea that because of all the change that has taken place in this "crisis" mode, the change management profession faces opportunities and threats.



Where are we now?

Threat for the Change Management Profession

- Change management has been democratised
- Change management has become more informal



- Treat managers and staff as customers of our profession.
- Recognise that our customers are the ones that need to be able to lead change.

Opportunity for the Change Management Profession

- Change is mission critical
- Change is a capability organisations really want



- Position change management as a discipline that delivers competitive advantage
- Collaboratively build the capability for change with our customers.

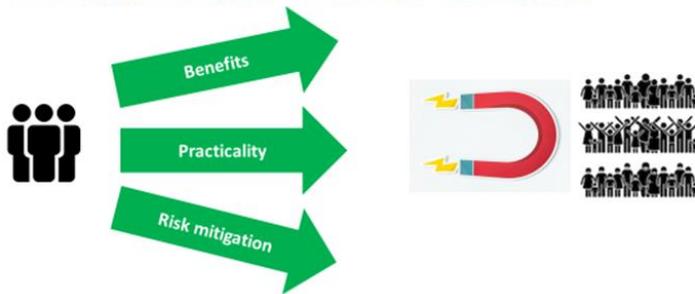
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To overcome these threats and to exploit these opportunities, we need to treat our audience as customers for our service, and we need to have a strategy for building an organisation-wide capability for change.

To create the “pull” model we need to reposition change management as having benefits whilst being easy to use, practical and intuitive.



Creating the “pull” from our customers



Customer centricity

We need to change our view of our stakeholders. In a “pull” model, those of us acting as change professionals need to view what we provide as a service to others. If those in the business “pull” knowledge from us, they are consuming a service, so we need to treat them as customers. I am offering a service that I want them to “buy” from me, so they are my customers.

To help me create relevant “selling” messages, I use this I use this Community Map to help me identify the different interest groups who can all be impacted positively by improved change management. These are my customers.

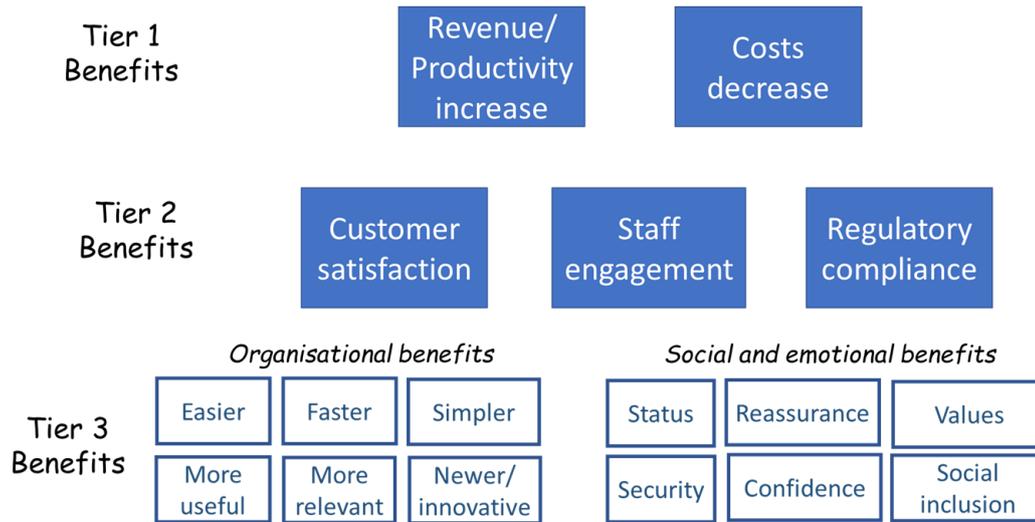
For each customer I need to identify how change management will help them do their job more easily. I am trying to define the value of change management to each role, and to do this I think about the results that effective change management will create.

When I am trying to describe value I keep in mind a famous marketing story about selling drill bits – people don’t want a quarter inch drill bit, they want a quarter inch hole! Another example of this is Charles Revson, who created Revlon cosmetics, who understood that the factories produced lipsticks but the staff in the shops sold hope, not lipsticks.

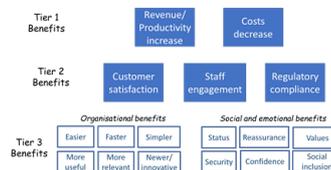
Another aspect of this value is that selling organisational benefits isn't always enough to motivate our customers we need to remember they have a personal interest in getting better at managing change. I am going to define this personal interest as two elements:

- Social interests – I want to look good in front of others
- Emotional interests – I want to feel good about what I am doing

This recognises that there is a hierarchy of benefits that creating a change management capability can achieve:



I bring the concepts of customer and value together in this matrix:



	Organisational benefits	Social needs "I want to look good"	Emotional needs "I want to feel good"
<p>1. Executive Leadership</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Board • Strategy Office • Sponsors 			
2. Project Team			
3. Line Managers			
4. Staff			
5. HR/OD/Finance/Risk Management/Audit			

Completing this matrix will enable us to tailor the different types of value we want to convey to our audience. If we do not tailor our messages to their needs, then we will not make an emotional connection that will convince them of the value we can provide. To be a true “pull” mechanism, our customers must want to embed change management into everything they are doing.

At this point in the webinar I asked the everyone for their views, and this is a representative set of quotes:

"Completely aligned with where I'm going at my organization - becoming more of a coach and spreading the skills enterprise wide."

"Completely agree, the more people you involve - reasonably - the better chance of success."

"CM specialists is not a model that's fit for purpose with us in terms of there being much too much change for specialists to manage even if we had enough of them; it needs to be owned and 'pulled' by line managers who are also change managers."

"Totally agree that we should be more customer centric as you have pointed out everyone is usually impacted by change so you need to take all along on that journey. The customer will always ask 'what is in it for me!'."

Several participants asked if we are going to become more customer centric, whether I thought that the current model where a central team of change specialists owns a change framework and toolkit was going to end.

I put forward the idea that this customer centricity is not likely to replace the current model, but will work alongside it. I believe that there will always be a need for an agreed approach to how change is managed in the organisation (change framework) and tools and techniques to support it. I think this hybrid model is beneficial because there has to be an agreement about the capability that we are transferring to those in the business and this is what this central team provides.

There were also questions about the role of the central team and whether I was advocating that they take on the responsibility for training everyone in change management. My view is that there is always a place for formal change management training courses that build knowledge and skills, and this is best accompanied by coaching in the practical application of this knowledge.

I think teams of change management specialists are best placed to provide this “on the spot/on demand” coaching model to support the training, and it is the combination of training and coaching that creates the organisation wide capability for change.

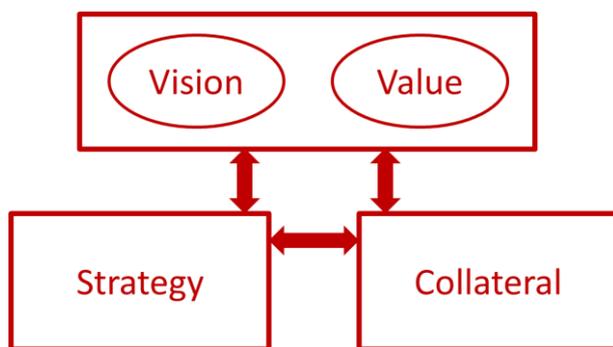
Capability for change

I started this part of the webinar by asking everyone what they thought were the elements of a capability for change. There were a variety of answers, in no particular order:

- Behaviours / Skills / Tools
- Board level enthusiasm and vocal support
- An understanding of where we're going - clear vision

- Coaching and training for line managers
- Trust
- Threat of survival
- Leadership vision
- An appetite for change
- Open mind
- The right people to start with
- Senior management support in giving their direct reports an explicit percentage of their time devoted to manage change
- Sponsorship
- Attitude - need people who embrace the change and can sell it to their peers and colleagues
- Cultural change needed

I agree with all these points, especially the recognition that if we are to build an organisation-wide capability for anything, it has to be treated as a cultural change. However, to simplify things, I put forward an idea that there are three core elements that constitute our change management offering to our customers, in this new world where change is led by the managers and staff most impacted by it:



I aligned vision and value together, because the vision is the destination, but it makes no sense unless we explain why we need to get there i.e. describe the value of achieving the destination. Likewise, telling staff how important creating a capability for change is, without describing what we mean will cause confusion, as an ability to manage change is open to interpretation. I have been creating this type of capability for organisations for many years, and whilst there are similarities, not once has the capability looked exactly the same in each organisation.

I also think it is important to create a strategy or approach, setting out how this shift in capability is going to be achieved. For me, creating a strategy before I begin any type of change has increased in importance over the years, because of the increasing demands on our time. I cannot afford to confuse those involved in how we are going to achieve our vision. I work collaboratively to define this approach but I always make sure it is documented so that we can continually refer to it and update it as we gather more details.

Finally, what I mean by collateral is all the things needed to build a capability, which I think has been captured by the list defined by those on the webinar. I think it includes the change management

framework and toolkit mentioned earlier, training courses, a coaching plan, and practice sessions and sessions to review progress and share experiences.

Conclusion

I am drawing my conclusion from the comments at the end of the webinar, and conversations following the webinar, where many change practitioners have continued to share their reasons why our profession is at an inflexion point. There is concern that if we return to a model that tells managers how they should do change, we will be regarded as patronising and out of touch.

Managers and staff have had more experience of change in the last few months than in the preceding few years, and that has created a new perspective. Some have enjoyed the experience, others are exhausted, but what they have in common is a track record of achievement, in many cases produced without our help.

Let's recognise this new baseline and build upon it. Let's ask our stakeholders what products and services they would find most useful, and let's concentrate on delivering them.

The future of change management is to be recognised as a core leadership skill, but we must promote the personal and organisational value of this skill if we want people to invest time and energy in developing it.

About the author

My job is to help organisations develop the capability to manage change and transformation. This involves a wide range of activities as no two organisations are the same. For example, I might devise the framework and methods to be used to become more Agile, more digital or more innovative. Other times I am leading the creation of an internal network of change management champions who lead themselves and their colleagues through transformation to achieve new ways of working. I am often in the board room supporting senior leaders to become effective sponsors and I go on to provide executive coaching throughout the life of significant change initiatives.

I love my job so much that I write articles and books to help transfer my knowledge and experience to the next generation of change managers. I am passionate about my profession and founded the [Continuous Change Community](#) to promote our profession globally.

To access more resources about change management, connect with me on LinkedIn <https://www.linkedin.com/in/melaniefranklin1/>