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MAKE CHANGE MANAGEMENT MORE HUMAN

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by Alain Thys

OVERVIEW

None of this is rocket science. In fact, many of us apply it in our daily life. When we start running, we look for a buddy who is already doing so. When COVID forced us to work from home, we rearranged the furniture or family schedule to accommodate this. When we're raising a child, we give the room to make their own mistakes within our general guidelines.

But somehow these lessons are often forgotten when the corporate change PowerPoint decks start flying around. At this point, HR leaders like yourself can make a massive difference to the business by pointing out that you're dealing with human resources who should be able to evolve in a human way. When you do this, you'll provide the support and guidance your team needs, remove potential obstacles to growth and foster positive change.

Most transformation programmes follow a largely linear script:

- ▲ Create a strategy.
- ▲ Explain it to the troops.
- ▲ Follow up with a process/action workshops and 'mindset' programmes to gain alignment.
- ▲ Conclude that steps 1 through 3 didn't really deliver the value that was expected.

DESPITE THIS APPARENTLY CLEAR STRATEGY, AROUND 70-80% OF TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMMES FAIL TO MEET THEIR BUSINESS OBJECTIVES.

There are two underlying reasons for this. Firstly, change isn't linear and secondly, getting humans to embrace new behaviour or a new reality is hard. Some experts even argue it is only possible if the people you target are already ready for the change you propose.

AS HUMAN 'EXPERTS', YOUR HR TEAM CAN POINT OUT THIS REALITY TO THEIR COLLEAGUES.

They can help them reshape their change or transformation efforts so that these are more attuned to our wonderfully irrational and social human nature rather than assume the mechanical implementation of a new way of thinking.

Specifically, this means that as an HR leader, you need to help the business embrace three basic principles of change management.

#1 - ACCEPT THAT CHANGE IS SOCIAL, ORGANIC AND EXPONENTIAL

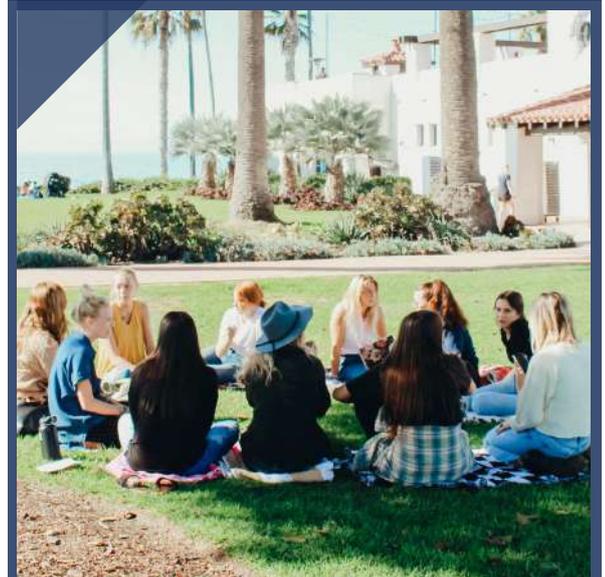
As an HR leader, you can show your business how to play with this reality. Instead of letting your business convince people to change you should focus on those employees that are already ready to move in the proposed new direction.

MAKE THEM THE CHAMPIONS OF THE CAUSE.

Highlight their achievements. Even give them public recognition for doing the right thing.

This will encourage others to mirror their actions whilst organically and exponentially starting to create the change you're looking for. As a bonus, this positive approach will also significantly reduce a sense of frustration for the executives that are trying to make change happen.

#2 - UNDERSTAND THAT CHANGE NEEDS A SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT



Humans are social beings. We define 'what is right' based on the behaviour of the people around us and the results they get from this behaviour. Just observe pedestrians at a red traffic light. If no one moves, everyone will probably wait even if there is no traffic around. But if one person crosses without getting run over, more people will follow.

THE SAME HAPPENS WHEN DEALING WITH ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Jumping onto new strategies or ways of working is often seen as uncomfortable or risky. But if people see colleagues move into a new direction and find that they don't get run over by the KPI-car, or even benefit, they will consider these actions too.



You will find it's easier to start a change movement than you think, especially when combined with a worthy cause (also see my earlier article, 'A Reason to Get Out of Bed').

BUT LIGHTING THE FIRE ISN'T ENOUGH.

You also need to keep it burning if you don't make the necessary preparations this can be hard.

The challenge is that most change programmes use circular reasoning. The organisation wants people to change their behaviour, but at the same time, it's set up to facilitate the old behaviour and potentially punish anything that deviates from that.

If you don't address this reality before asking people to 'join your movement', your change programme could end up heading towards a world of trouble. The first movers who really believe in what you say will rush into action, only to be run down by that proverbial KPI, process or culture train. When this happens, they won't just get discouraged themselves. Their colleagues will make a mental note that displaying the new behaviour is dangerous and therefore quickly revert to the safe zone of the old reality.

BEING REALISTIC, AS A HUMAN RESOURCE LEADER, YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO REMOVE ALL THESE OBSTACLES BY YOURSELF.

But you can work with different stakeholders to proactively review and eliminate the company's 'bad KPIs and processes' or at least find workarounds. You can also use



behavioural design methods to create nudges that facilitate action in the chosen direction.

The combination of these elements will avoid demotivating those who decide to act while increasing their likelihood of success.

#3 - REALISE THAT PEOPLE NEED SPACE TO CHANGE THEMSELVES

When management teams design a change programme, there is always the temptation to be thorough. Not only do they want to think through the new strategic or operational direction, but they also want to clearly envisage how this will come to life on a daily basis. And if they're honest, many would like to control the outcomes as much as possible.

While a certain amount of practical thought is required, doing too much of it can be counter-productive because by getting operational as a leadership team they:



...CAN ONLY ACCESS THE KNOWLEDGE AVAILABLE IN THE ROOM

This means that they miss out of the dozens of other and potentially better ways that a problem could be solved by others in the organisation.

...DEPRIVE THEIR PEOPLE OF THE JOY AND OWNERSHIP OF CREATING THEIR OWN DIRECTION.

Letting people solve their own problems may be inefficient. But even if they don't come with new insights (which they usually do), it greatly increases their engagement and thus willingness to execute the strategy.

...RISK TAKING THEIR EYE OFF THE STRATEGY BALL.

"You will find it's easier to start a change movement than you think"

Alain Thys, Experience Architect

By taking too much ownership of the strategy's execution, a leadership team risks convincing themselves that they're on the right track. By keeping a little distance, they can observe whether things are evolving in the right direction more objectively and therefore, keep their eyes on the strategy ball.

AS AN HR LEADER, IT'S YOUR ROLE TO CREATE THIS UNDERSTANDING AMONG YOUR COLLEAGUES ON THE LEADERSHIP TEAM.

They need to be very clear about the WHY and WHAT of the change they are proposing. But they need to leave the HOW to the people in the organisation.

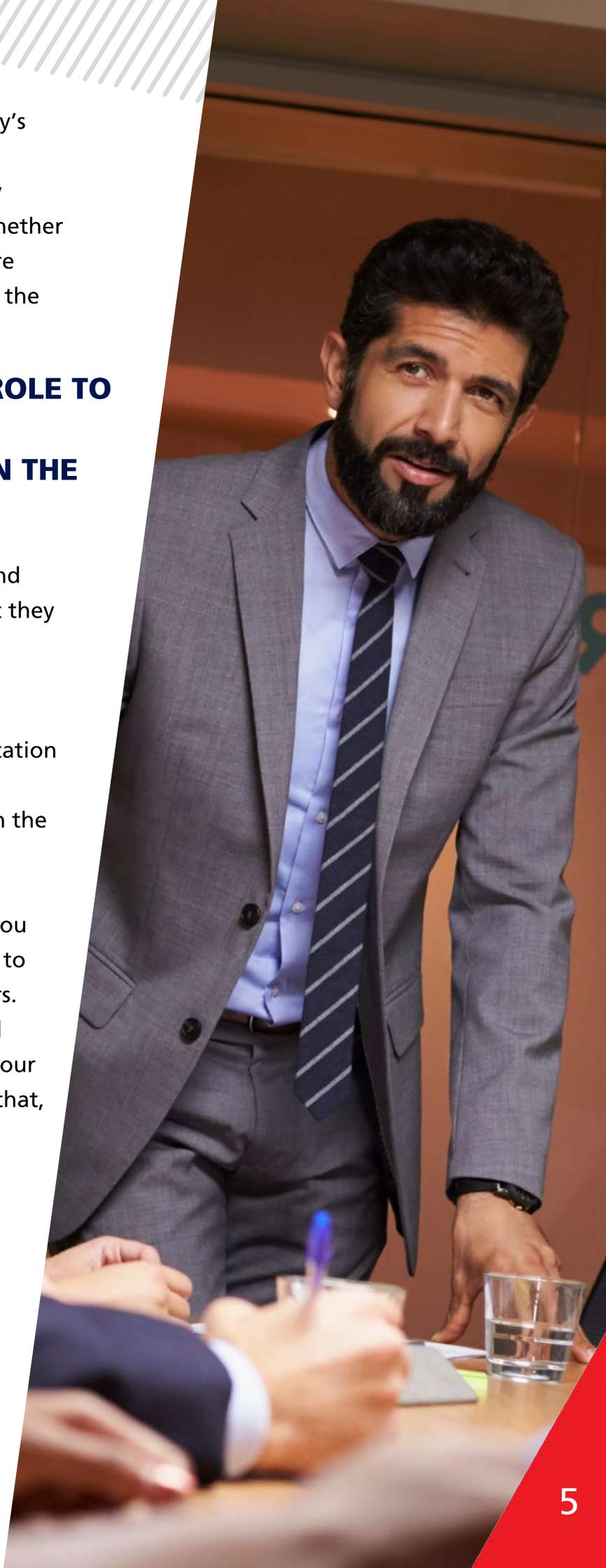
This may mean that the strategy's implementation may be different than the leadership team envisaged. But as long as the business goes in the right direction, this doesn't really matter.

As Antoine de Saint Exupery used to say "if you want to build a ship, don't drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea". Your job as a leader is to help your people yearn for the sea. Once they achieve that, you can step aside.

ALAIN THYS THE AUTHOR



Alain Thys is an experience architect who has led transformation programmes impacting employees in 100+ countries. He specialises in the development of customer, employee and stake/shareholder experiences that delight and transform.



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AS AN HR LEADER, YOU SEE THE CHANGE

Digitalisation brought us a world of new business models, eco-systems and complexity. New collar jobs require a lot of blend digital, technical and soft skills. Change has truly become a constant. Talent shortage is real.

YOU WANT TO EXPAND YOUR ROLE, BUT LACK THE TOOLS TO MAKE IT HAPPEN

In the 2020s, HR leaders will need to become true talent managers, proactively helping the business to manage the human aspects of digitalisation, uncertainty, engagement and supply chain transformation. And while you want to create tomorrow, your toolkit still focuses on improving yesterday, assuming that HR is only about attracting, developing, retaining and especially administrating employees. If you want to do more, the white papers on Google offer beautiful buzzwords but they provide little practical guidance.

HR & STRATEGIC CHANGE: Key services & tools to support you

- ▲ Personal coaching and assistance from global experts to expand HR to talent management.
- ▲ Craft employee experiences that increase employee engagement and help align behaviour to the company strategy.
- ▲ Engage your people with an organisational purpose that delivers profit and a sense of personal fulfilment.
- ▲ Create a tech positive culture, that uses automation and digitalisation to augment the performance of the talent in your business.
- ▲ Leverage the talent in your company's ecosystem for maximum value to your organisation.

**CONTACT US TO DISCOVER THE NEXT STEPS
FOR YOU AND YOUR COMPANY**



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