

Navigating Change Successfully

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What makes for the successful implementation and navigation of change in large organisations? And what approaches and practices might change agents and consultants adopt in trying to support those leading such initiatives? In this era of profound change – in which some 70% of change initiatives are reckoned to fail – many would give a great deal to have the answers to such questions.

Boldly, RowlandFisherLexonConsulting (RFLC) believe that they are close to striking gold. Through a combination of many years change consulting to high-profile private and public sector organisations, and an unusual annual investment of approximately 20% net profit in research and development, the company claims to have unlocked some of the key leadership and change-approach variables related to the successful implementation and navigation of high magnitude change.

Typically, RFLC will introduce three distinct, but complementary, frameworks to the client during the course of a large scale change assignment – each developed from an understanding of these ‘success variables’ and their application, and supported by an evolving set of diagnostics. These are ‘The Snowshoe’™, the ‘Change Quadrant’™ and the ‘RFLC Change Leadership Factors’™ - illustrated via a client case-study below.

RFLC are keen to point out, however, that successful change consulting is not about the mechanical application of ‘tools’. According to senior consultant, Roger Bellis: *"Our change frameworks help us and the client gain some clear, shared insights develop a shared language. But, ultimately, the skill of our work lies in being able to work at a human level with human processes, often 'in the moment', bringing both challenge and compassion to bear..."*.

A typical RFLC change assignment will involve working with a leadership team as well as a network of 'change agents' focused on the particular issue. The work is often focused at both individual and organisational levels simultaneously – as in the example of Jill

Ruddock, 'project office' leader at PricewaterhouseCoopers, profiled below. Jill required buy-in and behaviour change from six different functions in order for PwC to manage cross-functional projects more efficiently and effectively.

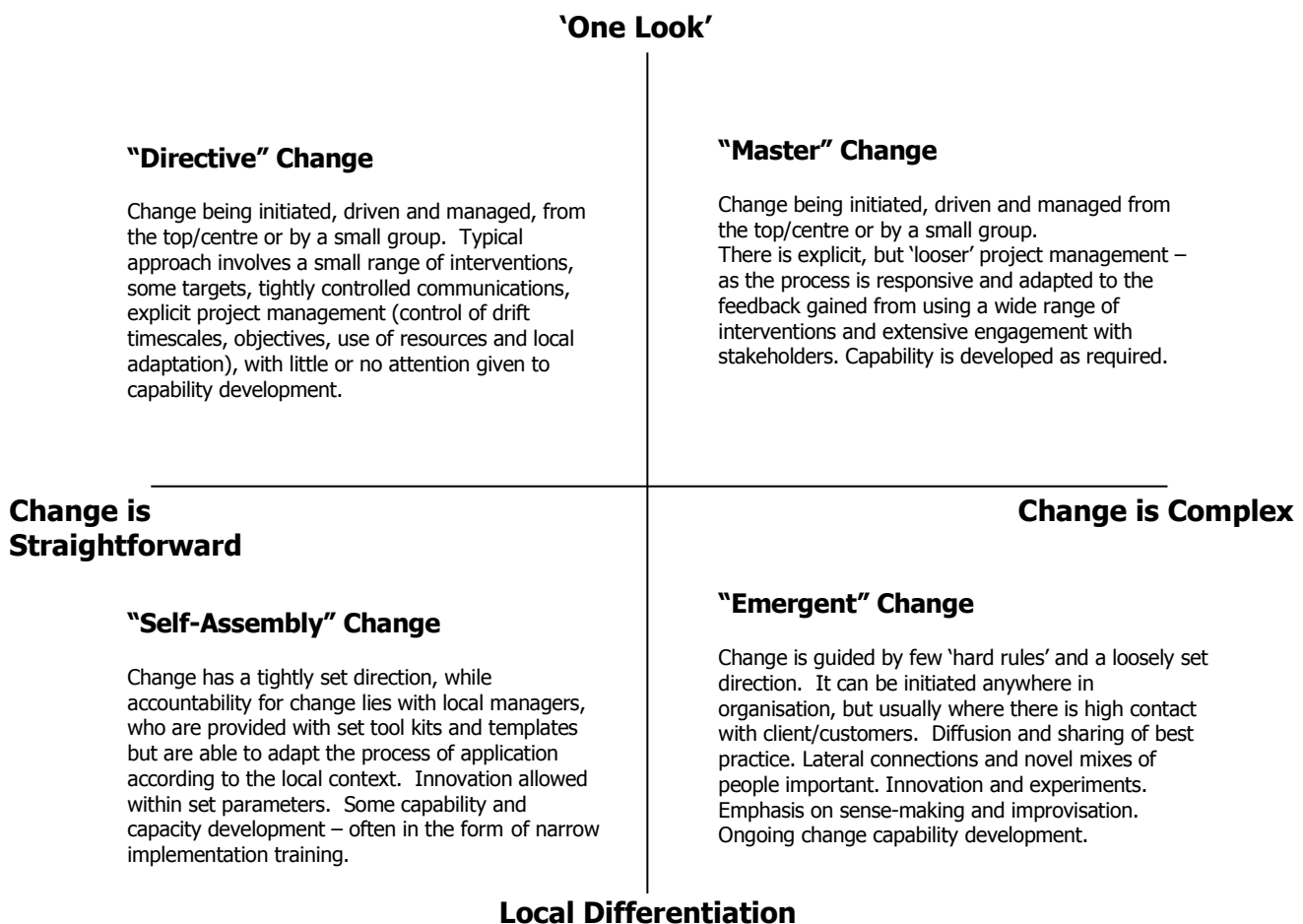
RFLC will often begin such change assignments by introducing 'The Snowshoe': a 'change map' that helps leaders plot their intended change process in relation to five distinct phases: Seeing Deeply, Framing and Choices, Taking First Steps, Learning and Review, and Steering. Critically, this can be applied to work at an individual, team, project or organisational level and allows for multiple change processes at different levels to be considered simultaneously.

The essence of 'The Snowshoe' as an intervention is that it helps leaders position themselves strategically in relation to the change and to make some empowering choices about how to proceed. For Jill, this was transformative in itself:

"The major shift for me was in taking the time to 'See Deeply'. That first, diagnostic phase is absolutely vital. Not that it needs to take long – in some situations a couple of hours could be enough – but it's about systematically thinking through exactly what you're doing, why you're doing it and the environment in which you're doing it..."

As part of this 'Seeing Deeply' phase, RFLC helps change leaders reflect on the *change approach* they intend to use as they move ahead by introducing them to the second of RFLC's principal frameworks, 'The Change Quadrant'. This framework is derived from coding and mapping some 70 change stories from leaders in 12 organisations, against a large cross-section of the literature on organisational change. It is summarised in the figure below.

The RFLC 'Change Quadrant'™



What RFLC's research shows, perhaps unsurprisingly, is that the majority of leaders and organisations will tend to adopt a highly programmatic, 'Directive' approach to change. And yet RFLC's change-story analysis shows that such an approach to high-magnitude change, when considered as a possible, contributory factor, accounts for 48% of the possible reasons for failure!

On the other hand, this analysis shows that an 'Emergent' approach to such change accounted for a highly significant 32% of possible reasons for success and – perhaps counter-intuitively - also proved the most effective approach for organisations requiring short-term change i.e. implementation in 12 months or less.

For RFLC, the Change Quadrant is not about 'converting' clients to any one approach, but opening up a conversation that allows them to proceed more consciously and strategically – informed by a clearer sense of options, given their particular operational context. In other words, as well as helping 'See Deeply', the Change Quadrant also helps in the next phase on the Snowshoe: 'Framing and Choices'.

RFLC senior consultant, Nancy Clay, describes this work with Jill:

"We'd walk around the Quadrant – saying 'Where do you think you currently are...?' and she was basically in Self-Assembly... So we'd say, well if you wanted to move into Directive, what would that look like? What would the implications be and the actions that you'd be doing differently? If it were Master, what would they be? And for Emergent? And she found that very helpful... for me not to provide an opinion for her, but to inquire with her – in a way that made those change approaches very real options."

During this process, Jill became clearer about the difficulties inherent in her approach towards trying to move six different functions towards a common set of changed behaviours, via the adoption of a set of high-level principles. She realised that they were highly likely, with a Self-Assembly approach, to *"just take the principles and adapt them to suit themselves – which would defeat the object. I became concerned and frustrated about my ability to break into their cultures and open them to something different."*

With Nancy's support, Jill therefore attempted a shift towards more of a Master approach, moving into the 'Taking First Steps' phase of The Snowshoe:

"What I did was dialogue with the functions more – not to let them off the hook – but so that I could respond to their concerns and they could see the value of what I was asking for. If I'd stuck with a more distant, unilateral approach I wouldn't have achieved the breakthrough that I did."

During such work with leaders, RFLC consultants will often introduce the third of its three key frameworks: 'RFLC Change Leadership Factors'. These derive from another analysis

of RFLC's change-story data, which identifies three clear groupings of leadership behaviour, each correlating differently to successful change outcomes: i) Shaping behaviour; ii) Framing change and iii) Creating capacity.

Leaders find the headline research findings provocative:

a) Leadership behaviours that centre on the position, role and power of the leader and their abilities i.e. 'Shaping behaviour', do not appear to correlate with the success of a change intervention – and, indeed, both the qualitative data and a partial correlation analysis suggest that such behaviours actually impair success.

b) In high magnitude change, the leadership factor that accounted for the highest variance in success – at 52% - was 'Framing change', involving the following group of behaviours: establishing 'starting points' for change; designing and managing the change journey; and, communicating guiding principles.

c) In long-term change initiatives and within organisations facing continuing change 'Creating Capacity' correlates with increased success - particularly when combined with a 'Master approach' to change, involving relatively high 'Framing change' behaviours. 'Creating capacity' involves the two behaviours: creating individual and organisational capabilities; and, creating and communicating connections.

At the core of RFLC's consultancy – and, arguably, at the centre of the successful implementation and navigation of change – is therefore the sensitive work of helping leaders adjust their leadership behaviours so that they might better 'frame' and 'build capacity'.

According to Jill:

'For me, this was a big challenge – finding the right balance between shaping and framing. My style is naturally directive, quite shaping – so in trying to adopt behaviours that would help in this situation, there was a quite a bit of trial and error – and maybe I

went too far in the other direction sometimes. But for that set of people across those six functions, I found the right place – which is always pleasing...'

For RFLC, the 'trial and error' experienced by Jill is a key part of working successfully with change. Success requires the ability to assume some risk and to experiment with new behaviours, often opening to personal shifts – related particularly to adopting less controlling approaches to change. Hence the importance of the next phase of The Snowshoe: Learning and Support.

Regular periods of reflection and review of progress enable clients to digest their experiences and to integrate these fully into their evolving leadership style and capabilities. Sometimes this can be supported by specific 'change capacity' building – such as the 'Basics in Emergent Change' (BEC) course, RFLC co-created and co-delivered for another client: a global energy company. The experience of Bas Verkooijen, Manager, Central Eastern Europe and Russia, more than matches that of Jill:

"By nature I am more oriented towards programmatic change than emergent change. But I have really worked hard at how to apply a few hard rules e.g. related to our business principles, or to authority, or volume and margin developments – and then allowing people to play in the space defined by them. I have seen how people who are good really do excel in that space – and they develop their business and themselves much more strongly... I've also seen my workload dramatically reduced. So before I would expect to be involved in almost everything – but now, by building trust and having a clear sense of direction in terms of objectives and behaviours – I can let it go a lot more. I would say my workload – particularly in terms of emails and voicemails – has reduced by 30-40%..."

The true value of such 'learning' is that the final phase on The Snowshoe – 'Steering' – can be appropriately light touch. RFLC report that, having helped frame the change initiative appropriately and through continually transferring learning, the ongoing advisory work – focused on successful outcomes – becomes relatively subtle. As Jill describes it:

'RFLC's real value was in talking me through the things we could do, what we needed to take into account as we did them, looking at the behaviours we were after and what was in it for the individuals involved.... And for me a critical incident was when two individuals from one function came to me – who six months previously had not wanted to do what I was asking of them – and they'd nearly completed it... At some point the light had gone on... and it was about the extent to which I'd worked with them, and got them to the place we wanted them to be...'

For RFLC, the successful implementation and navigation of change requires leadership that, firstly, is open to alternative ways of framing the change and making increasingly conscious choices about how to proceed. Secondly, it requires skilful framing of that change and the challenges involved, to fully engage and motivate others; and, thirdly, it requires an investment in the leader's own learning and capacity development – such that they are better able to grow the capacity of others, on whom they are ultimately so reliant to deliver.

True success comes, not only when a leader's colleagues and direct reports really do deliver, but when they themselves also grow and flourish, simultaneously.

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