

Building Change Capability in Non-Change Managers

WHITEPAPER



Introduction

The rapid pace of organisational change today demands that all employees, especially non-change managers, possess the skills to cope with and drive change. We must lead ourselves through changes that affect how we work, and in addition, many of us are responsible for supporting our colleagues in adopting new ways of working. These skills are especially relevant for supervisors, team leaders and managers who are at the forefront of implementing change within their teams. Their capability in this area crucial for overall organisational success. Some organisations are already recognising that job descriptions need to reflect the duality of roles, not just describing how to get today's job done but that the role also includes responsibility for changing the job. Here are just a couple of examples from role descriptions advertised today:

- **Marketing Manager** – *“Participate in organisation-wide strategy planning and expand our thinking around the role of marketing in achieving growth.”*
- **Finance Manager** – *“Always looking for opportunities to improve the business.”*
- **Operations Manager** – *“Proven success in leading transformational change management, implementing process change through people and capacity building, and influencing positive change in complex, fast-paced environments.”*

These examples tell us what we already know, change management is a universal skill-set, not limited to those in project, programme, business change and transformation roles.

Change capability has risen to prominence in the last few years as a result of the volume of change taking place. I believe we are at a tipping point, where we now have a critical need for building change capabilities across all levels of seniority, and for all roles. Without this volume of involvement, organisations will struggle to adopt innovations and meet customer, industry and societal changes.

This whitepaper describes the impact of change on organisations, the benefits of empowering non-change managers in managing constant change, and strategies for fostering a culture for a transforming organisation.



Building Change Capability in Non-Change Managers

Developing Skills and Confidence

Change capability is a combination of skills along with the confidence to use them. Building this capability in non-change managers is essential for creating a workforce that can both do and improve their jobs. This dual focus on execution and improvement is crucial for organisations aiming to remain competitive in a rapidly changing environment.

Change capability is not just about acquiring skills and confidence, but also about knowing how to apply them in specific contexts, using an "applicability filter" to assess the circumstances and ask the right questions. It requires a mindset shift from simply being an expert to being a learner, embracing the ability to learn from failures. True change capability is a combination of skills, confidence, and support—where psychological safety, along with coaching and mentoring, creates an environment for growth. This capability is built over time, requiring ongoing development and reflection.

At the organisational level, change capability extends beyond individual skills to the broader system. It's about building a collective capability that can adapt and thrive, ensuring that it's not reliant on any single person to avoid points of failure. For change capability to thrive, there must also be a desire to develop and use these skills, not just within individuals but embedded across the organisation.

Rather than seeing capability as a static, perfect state, it should be viewed as something that is "good enough" to meet the demands of the situation and adaptable as circumstances change. As individuals and teams build this capability, it becomes unconscious, a natural part of how they operate. A key aspect of change capability is self-awareness: recognising whether one has developed bad habits and remaining vigilant to continuously improve. Capability is also demonstrated through teaching others, earning trust, and adapting to different circumstances, with each person having their own benchmark for what it means to be capable. Ultimately, change capability is the integration of skill, will, and behaviour, forming a "do it" attitude that enables organisations and individuals to navigate and sustain change effectively.

This definition of capability can be used to ensure that any training, coaching or mentoring activities provide an explanation of techniques and potential solutions in conjunction with guidance of how to use these techniques and opportunities to practice them in low risk environments.

It can be argued that this initial definition of change capability can be enhanced to include motivation to learn. In order to learn new skills and put the effort into practicing them, individuals must have a desire to build this capability.

Video is an intentional choice to provide dynamic engaging content – and it also has the advantage of being a form in which the viewer (or learner) has useful control over the pace in which content is presented. Controls like pause, rewind, jumping to the middle, or stopping at any time to accommodate their needs and situational context.

The Importance of Change Capability

There are many strategic and employee benefits for building change capability including the value of the change skill set and the benefits of organisational agility:

Coping with Change: A Critical Skill

In the modern workplace, employees are often overwhelmed by the multitude of changes occurring simultaneously. Responsibilities at work have changed to reflect the volume of change taking place. All employees, irrespective of their level of experience or seniority have a dual responsibility for doing their work and improving their work. Employees should not only focus on their day-to-day tasks but also on improving how they perform those tasks. This dual focus on doing and improving their job is essential for fostering a culture of continuous improvement and adaptability in organisations.

Teaching non-change managers how to cope with change is not just about reducing stress but also about enhancing organisational resilience. When employees are equipped to handle transformation, they can contribute more effectively to their organisations' ability to innovate and respond to market shifts.

Resource Levels Match Ambition

Increasing the number of resources with change capability addresses the resource gap caused by high volumes of change.

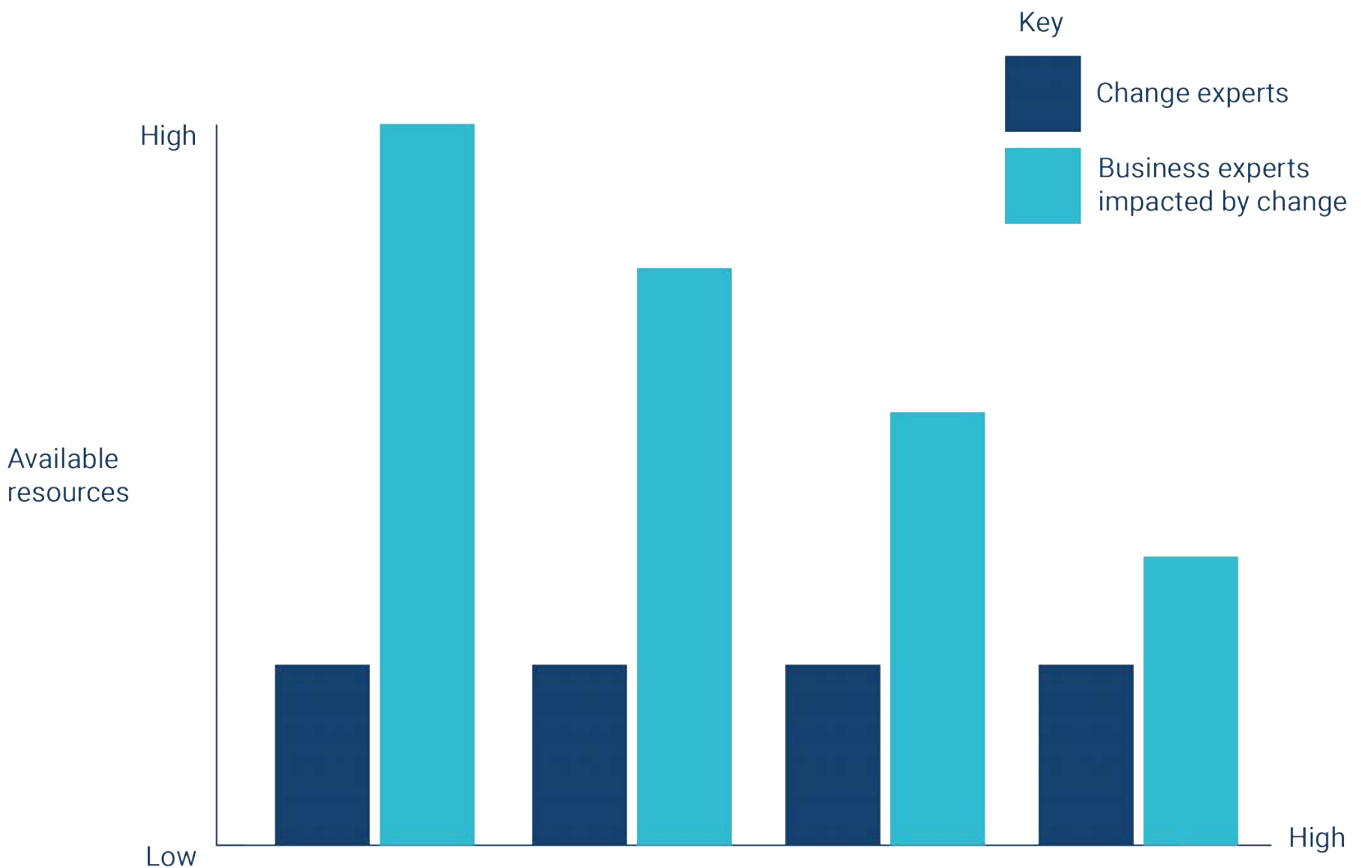


Figure 1 Resource gap for change initiatives continues to grow, Copyright © 2024 Capability for Change Limited

Currently there are two types of resource involved in change: Professional change managers and “accidental” change leaders.

- Professional change managers are drawn from the project management profession, shifting their focus from tangible delivery of change to behavioural change needed to adopt new ways of working. They also come from people development roles, or from the business, having developed a passion for making change happen.
- “Accidental” change leaders contribute to the change alongside their full time role. They help to design the change, develop the processes, policies, quality standards and measures for the new ways of working and influence their colleagues to participate and work differently.

By building the capability across a broad range of managers and staff, there are more people to call upon to contribute to defining, developing and implementing change.

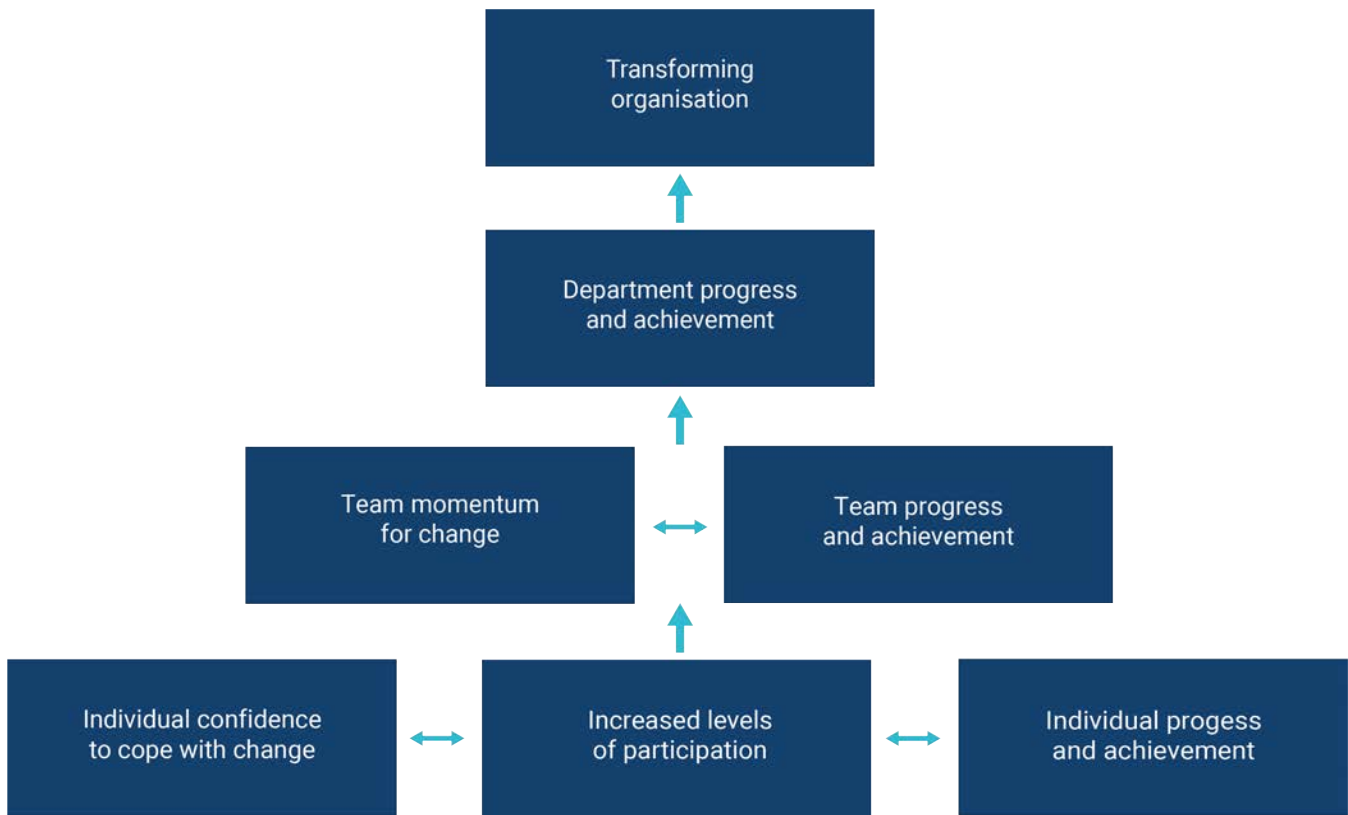


Figure 2 Individual capability for change accelerates organisational capability for change, Copyright © 2024 Capability for Change Limited

Enabling Organisational Agility

Organisations that succeed in embedding change capabilities within their workforce can more readily implement new ideas and strategies. This agility is essential for staying competitive in industries characterised by rapid evolution. There is a growing recognition that to remain successful in a rapidly changing business environment, organisations must transition from simply managing change to becoming continuously transforming entities. This means building a "transforming organisation" rather than just managing individual transformations. This is a shift in how we view change, enabling senior leaders to align effective change management with broader organisational goals, such as agility, innovation, and growth.

A transforming organisation applies a collective and continuous view of all the changes planned and taking place. It uses portfolio management to align all efforts towards a shared purpose, where every team member contributes to a common goal.

It fosters pride in being part of a continuously evolving culture, ensuring inclusivity and positive experiences of change to maintain momentum. Transforming organisations are agile, able to pivot in response to internal and external shocks, and they reflect on successes and failures to improve.

Transforming organisations have strong line manager capabilities that help create new processes, policies, responsibilities along with time to understand and practice new ways of working to embed these as new habits. These efforts are supported by strategic buy-in from senior leadership, who are visible, and communicate the shared purpose frequently and with enthusiasm.

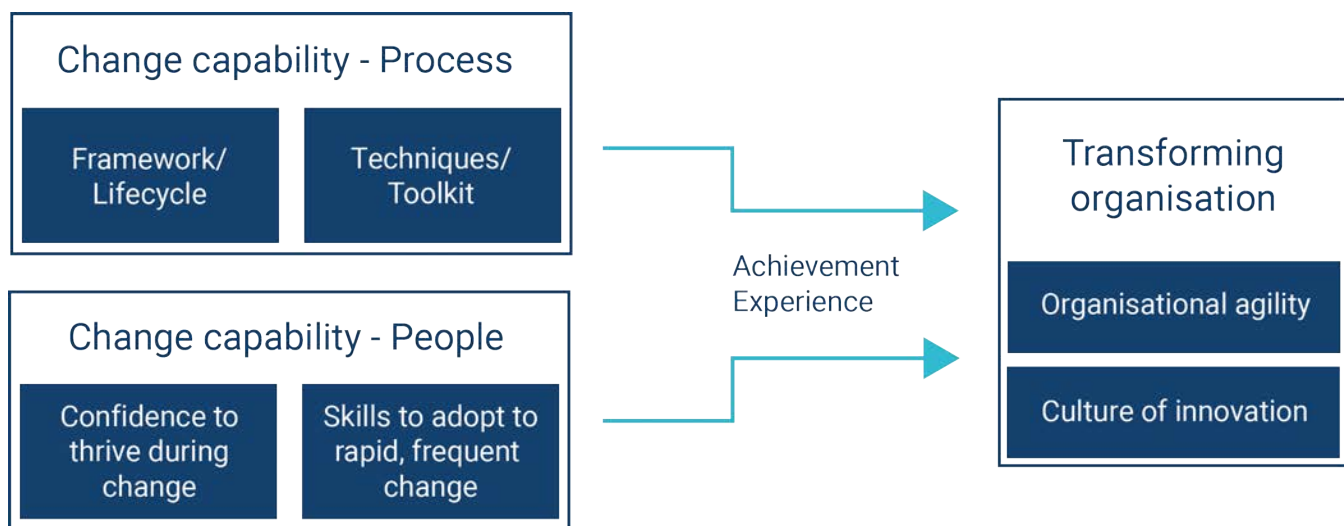


Figure 3 Process and people form a transforming organisation, Copyright © 2024 Capability for Change Limited

In this way, transformation becomes a core, ongoing capability rather than a one-off initiative. By integrating change into performance metrics and goals, building change capability across all levels, and fostering synergies between initiatives and corporate strategy, these organisations position themselves for long-term success and innovation.



Recent Examples of Change Capability Building

To illustrate change capability, here are two recent examples.

A significant cultural shift is required for organisations to transition from traditional roles to those that prioritise innovation and partnership. Franklin provides examples, such as a European regulatory body and universities, that have successfully embedded a culture of continuous improvement and openness to change.

Hiring individuals who are enthusiastic and open to change can significantly impact an organisation's ability to innovate and adapt. Franklin's experience with universities highlights how hiring early adopters from diverse backgrounds leads to more dynamic and questioning work environments, which is beneficial for organisational growth.

European Regulatory Body

This organisation has offices in all European member states, and a central head office. As the pace of change increased, the frequency of updates to regulations also increased, and this organisation recognised that it had to build an on-going capability of change. The board recognised that change was no longer going to be one-off initiatives, but was going to continue into the future. They had some ideas of the technological and societal changes that would affect their work, but could not predict exactly what would be required. They believed that by developing a culture of "change ability and readiness" they would be able to cope and thrive in this new paradigm.

The cultural shift required was clearly communicated and the board provided visible support. However, after nine months of structural changes, the organisation found itself stuck. Everyone was talking about the new culture, but nothing was really changing. The breakthrough came when they revised employees' role descriptions to include both doing their job and improving their job. This shift not only aligned employees' responsibilities with organisational goals but also integrated change management into the performance evaluation process, leading to more effective change adoption.

UK University

Universities in the United Kingdom have had over a decade of government intervention along with significant societal change, triggered by new generational experiences and the impact of Covid and hybrid working.

In both cases, these universities realised that they had to view change as a strategic capability. If the changes they needed to make were not given this profile and the priority, they would fail.

In one case, a Vice Chancellor emphasised the importance of improvement in even the most routine tasks, such as preparing and selling sandwiches. By encouraging every employee to think about how they could enhance their work processes, the university fostered a culture of continuous improvement.

In another, the university applied a deliberate policy of hiring early adopters led irrespective of which industry they had worked in before. This had the immediate impact of creating a more diverse workforce with more ideas for



change and more examples of change in other organisations. This super-charged the energy of everyone around them, increasing the willingness to change and to challenge the status quo. This approach underscored the value of recruiting individuals who are not just experts in their field but also enthusiastic about change, contributing to a more dynamic and innovative organisational culture.

Strategic Insights on Change Management

The Role of Senior Leadership

Senior leaders must recognise their role in not just sponsoring individual change initiatives but in leading a transforming organisation. This requires a shift in perspective, where leaders see themselves as responsible for building the ability of the organisation to continually evolve, rather than as sponsors of discrete change projects or transformation programmes.

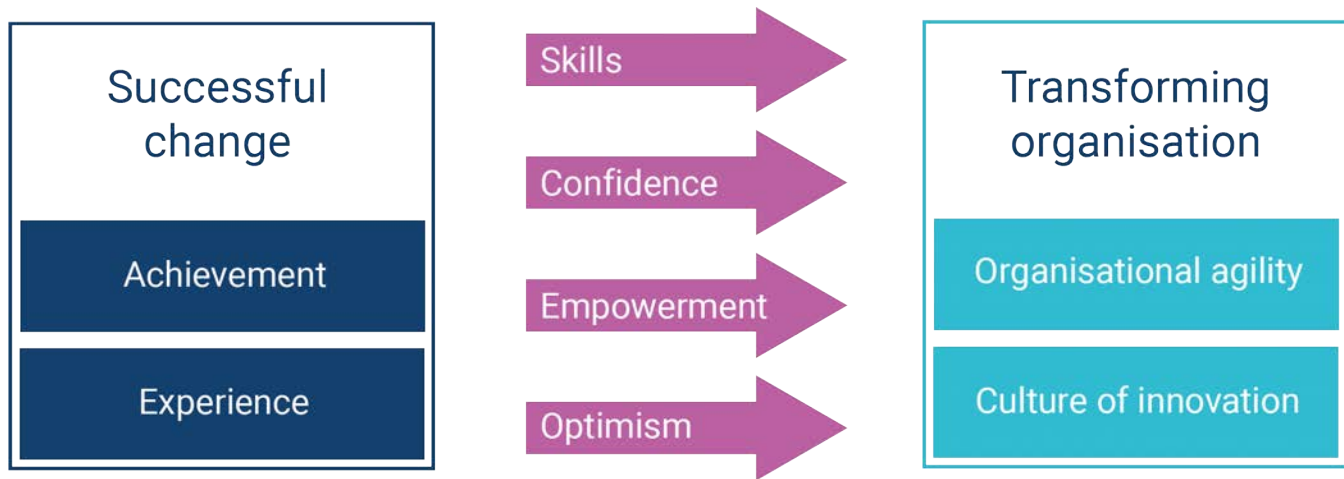


Figure 4 High levels of achievement and experience underpin the transforming organisation, Copyright © 2024 Capability for Change Limited

Change management should be seen as strategically valuable, not just as a process-oriented function. Measuring the success of change initiatives should focus on the outcomes they produce, such as increased productivity, customer satisfaction, and overall organisational success, rather than just the adoption of new practices.

When senior managers adopt these measures, it is easier for them to appreciate the strategic and operational benefits of well planned, consistent, repeatable change activities.

The Impact of Poor Change Management

To increase the appreciation of change capabilities, it can be helpful to understand the impact when they are not developed. Failure to manage the human side of change can lead to organisational stagnation. Driving through change without considering the employee experience can result in cynicism, resistance, and ultimately, failed change initiatives. The experience employees have during change initiatives is as important as the outcomes achieved. A positive change experience, where employees feel valued and respected, leads to greater engagement, skill development, and a willingness to embrace future changes.

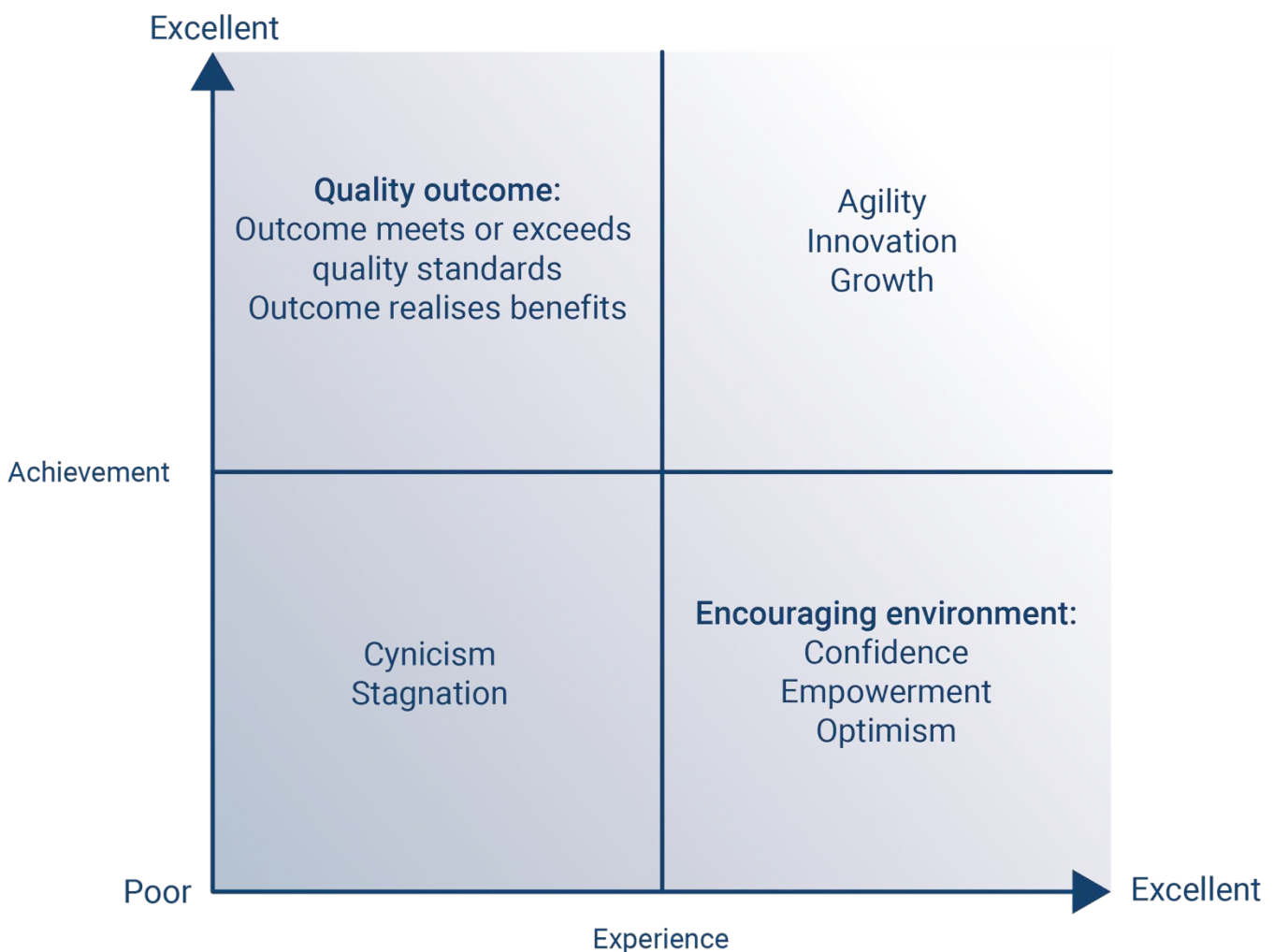


Figure 5 High levels of achievement and experience underpin the transforming organisation, Copyright © 2024 Capability for Change Limited

Leaders must balance achieving change outcomes with ensuring a positive change experience to maintain momentum and foster a culture of continuous improvement. This includes identifying the potential impact of change before a change initiative is authorised. Many organisations are facing change saturation, where the volume of changes overwhelms employees, leading to stress and burnout, which increases staff turnover, and a loss of productivity and organisational memory, factors that are needed most during periods of change. It's crucial to assess and manage the cumulative workload to avoid creating a negative experience for employees.



Practical Tools and Resources

To support non-change managers in their roles, it is important to ensure that those who are showing interest in building their capability have access to techniques, short-cuts, ideas and advice from experienced change professionals.

We need to provide practical steps that address the most common problems encountered in change. Identify success criteria for the help that managers need, including:

- Compact: short interventions that answer a specific need
- Immediate: available at the point of need
- Relevant: must address their context, which is continuous, high volumes of change
- Real: do not use theoretical examples, use real-life situations
- Neurodiverse: support all learning preferences

Technologies that support learning and development and fast evolving, so look for platforms emphasise the explanation of how to do something, not just statements about what needs to be done. Ensure the platforms offer bite-sized learning opportunities to reflect the time-poor nature of work and AI-driven support as effective means of empowering employees to take charge of their change efforts. These tools enable individuals to access the help they need when they need it, fostering a self-service approach to change management.



Conclusion

The ability to navigate and lead change is no longer a skill reserved for specialised change managers. In today's fast-paced business environment, all employees must be equipped with the capabilities to manage and implement change. By building these capabilities across the organisation, companies can enhance their agility, foster a culture of continuous improvement, and maintain a competitive edge.

This whitepaper has outlined the importance of embedding change management skills in non-change managers, shared insights from real-world examples, and provided strategic guidance for leaders aiming to cultivate a transforming organisation. As change continues to accelerate, the organisations that succeed will be those that prioritise and invest in building change capability at all levels.

These key points underscore the need for organisations to strategically invest in building change capability across all levels, ensuring that both the process and experience of change contribute to long-term success.