Change by Design: How universities should design change initiatives for success

Paul Woodgates

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About the author

Until 2021, Paul Woodgates was a Partner at PA Consulting, where he built and ran the education consulting practice internationally. He has worked extensively with frontline education providers, government, regulators and funding bodies in the UK and elsewhere to define strategy, improve outcomes, deliver better services and reduce cost. He is a Chartered Accountant and across his career has worked as an auditor, consultant, programme leader and change manager in a range of organisations.

Since leaving PA Consulting, Paul has combined working as an independent strategic adviser to leaders in the education sector with non-executive roles. He is a Governor and Chair of the Finance and Performance Committee at De Montfort University, a Non-Executive Director of Advance HE, a Trustee of the British Council and a Non-Executive Director of the Education and Skills Funding Agency. He writes here in a personal capacity.

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1. Introduction

Universities, like all organisations, need to change as the world around them changes. That impetus has never been greater than it is now: universities must adapt to global challenges, to the needs of students, to the demands of government and regulators and to the opportunities new technology creates.

But achieving change is hard. Whatever the demands to change, the business of today's research and education must of course go on – so change must always be delivered alongside day-to-day operations. And there is almost never universal agreement to any change – different groups take different views about what should come next or whether change is needed at all. That makes change controversial and inclined to engender dissent and distrust.

Furthermore, change is often time consuming and resource hungry; it takes tenacity and commitment to make change happen, and even more to make it stick. Most concerning of all, change can lead to unintended consequences and there is a real risk that any change to what a university does or the way it does it can unintentionally damage the essence of what makes it special and undermine its identity as an academic institution.

But change is without doubt part of the future – change is, as the philosopher Heraclitus supposedly commented, the only constant in life.[1] As a result, almost all universities have substantial portfolios of change initiatives – very possibly labelled 'transformation' to demonstrate the scale of what is involved. Many have invested in significant capacity and capability to deliver change – creating strategic change offices, devising change implementation methods, bringing in external advisors and appointing senior managers with job titles like 'Chief Transformation Officer' or 'Director of Strategic Change'.[2]

In spite of such investments, it is common for staff in universities to comment that their institution is not good at change. Many believe that managing change is a systemic organisational weakness and will recite, perhaps with glee, stories of internal change initiatives that have gone disastrously wrong, cost too much or generally failed to deliver the promised benefits.

I recently retired from a consulting firm after a career spanning 35 years working with a wide range of organisations in the UK and overseas. For the

last 20 years, I led an education sector practice and spent much of my time working with universities. The common theme of the projects in which I have been involved has been change of one kind of another. That has encompassed change to what a university does, how it does it, the way it is organised and how it uses its resources. I have drawn on this experience, together with discussions with those who have a role in delivering change in universities, to explore in this paper the reasons why change is hard to deliver in higher education institutions and what might be done to improve success.

This paper is not intended to be a manual for running change projects.[3] Much has already been written about how best to do that – covering approaches to project and programme management, governance and risk management.[4] Many universities have developed their own change management guides to be used on all internal projects.[5] I will, however, focus on one aspect of the change lifecycle which typically receives scant attention: the design of the change process itself. To be clear, I do not here mean the design of the solution – the new system, the new organisational structure, the new income diversification strategy, or whatever – but the means by which the change from the status quo to the new arrangements will be accomplished. Giving more consideration to the journey as well as the destination can, I suggest in this paper, greatly increase the prospects of success from the endeavour.

Throughout my career, I have on occasion been subject to the criticism that as a consultant from the world of business, I cannot truly understand universities and blindly want to change them into corporate commercial entities. That is far from the case: I have always had nothing but the highest admiration for the role universities play in creating and disseminating knowledge, bringing life-changing education to students and changing society for the better. As I hope this paper demonstrates, my aim in working with universities has never been to change that mission, but to help deliver it better.

2. The change challenge

Why do we need to change anyway?

> *'Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past or present are certain to miss the future'.*
>
> President John F. Kennedy[6]

If change has become a constant in higher education, it is worth pausing to question what it is all for. Change in universities broadly falls into one or more of the following six categories.

i) Change driven by a new strategy or market positioning

Most university staff will be familiar with the concept that a strategy – however long it was intended to last – in practice survives only as long as the tenure of the vice-chancellor. When a new leader is appointed, a new strategy generally follows. New strategies mean change to, for example:

- Organisational models – changes to faculties, colleges, departments and institutes or professional services functions;
- Research focus – perhaps chasing newly available funding;
- Student offerings – launching new academic programmes and closing old ones, and sometimes the same for whole departments;
- Geographic footprint – opening or closing campuses locally or at a distance, including overseas; and
- Partnerships and collaborations – for example with pathway providers or further education (FE) colleges.

ii) Change driven by government policy or regulation

The need to respond to the changing legal and regulatory framework in which universities operate drives change across both academic and professional services functions. Examples include:

- The demands of the funding system – including the need to recruit students in a competitive market;
- Regulatory requirements in order to operate – such as, in England, the Office for Students Conditions of Registration and Access and Participation Plans;
- The need to respond to service performance regimes such as the Teaching Excellence Framework and the Research Excellence Framework, as well as the National Student Survey;

- The visa regime;
- A range of requirements on the sector such as Prevent and Freedom of Speech;
- Regulation that applies to some areas of what a university does including Ofsted inspection for apprenticeships and NHS requirements for healthcare education; and
- Wider regulation that applies to any organisation – such as the Equality Act and health and safety regulations.

iii) Change driven by a desire to create more efficient use of resources

Many universities have undertaken initiatives designed to improve efficiency and ensure the best use of limited resources. Sometimes, these are simply about cutting costs but in many cases they are at least as much concerned with ensuring better service delivery to students and staff. Often, such initiatives have a major technology component – relying on new systems that promise much slicker management of resources and the ability to remove unnecessary human processing.

Examples include:

- Restructuring professional services to create common standards for delivery – using shared service centres, or centralised delivery functions that bring together all of the university's capability in a particular domain, such as finance;
- New systems and processes to optimise student recruitment – often using commercially available Customer Relationship Management systems;
- New systems and processes to transform service delivery to students and improve retention and outcomes – probably calling upon proprietary Student Record Systems; and
- Improved ways of managing the business – for example finance systems, HR systems and research management systems.

iv) Change driven by external events

Even with the best planning in the world, real events will create a need to implement change. The most obvious example of course is COVID – which drove a huge range of changes in university operations from the need to deliver remote teaching at a scale which had hitherto never been anticipated to ensuring campus biosafety and facilitating remote working for staff.

There are other examples too. Geopolitical events have driven change for some – such as the closure of overseas campuses in the face of political unrest.

v) Change driven by managerial innovation

New management ideas have driven change too. Some services, such as cleaning, security and catering have been outsourced – and in some cases, later brought back in house. Innovation in approaches to performance management have been implemented. New ways of supporting staff and students have been created.

vi) Change driven by technological opportunity

Finally, there is a raft of change (often overlapping with the other categories) that happens because new technologies allow different ways of doing things. Distance learning and remote working are the most obvious examples, but there are many others such as use of GPS technologies on campus, peer-to-peer networks and digital marketing. Increasingly, bots and artificial intelligence are being used with major consequential changes for staff and organisational structures.

Are universities good at managing change?

The UK's universities have always needed to change and in many respects have a strong history of doing it well. Indeed it is reasonable to believe that the ability of the sector to evolve in response to change in the external environment, while simultaneously protecting the essence of what a university is, has been a critical part of its sustained success over the years.

When the Oxbridge monopoly was broken in the nineteenth century, new institutions were born and rapidly thrived. When Robbins-inspired growth became the order of the day in the 1960s, the sector responded – opening new universities and creating new programmes to meet the needs of the world as it then was.[7] After the divide between polytechnics and universities ended in the 1990s, again institutions showed a remarkable ability to embrace new structures and the massification of higher education. When government introduced the competitive market for higher education in the 2010s, the sector demonstrated an ability to deal with new funding systems, competitive pressures and the dynamics of students-as-consumers. Most recently, universities adapted to the challenges of COVID-enforced remote working in extraordinarily short timescales.

So there is surely a case to be made that universities are actually very good at embracing change and adapting to the trends, demands and opportunities of the times they live in. Perhaps the very longevity of universities is at least partly down to this very trait. Compared to other sectors, they have shown a remarkable resilience: there are no equivalents in higher education to Kodak, Betamax or Thomas Cook.

And yet the view that 'this institution is bad at change' is widely held among staff in universities. Students perhaps are less aware of the process of change but may regard their university as outdated and slow at adapting to the modern world compared to other areas of their lives. As for university leaders, many would argue that change is very challenging, time consuming and costly; and that they 'have the scars to prove it'.

So while the sector's record of adapting to externally imposed existential threats is good, the history of change initiatives in individual institutions is decidedly mixed. The conceptual diagram below can be used to position change initiatives against the extent to which they achieve their intended objectives (whether those are increased student recruitment, a better student experience, lower costs, improved research performance or some other benefit) and against the amount of cost, effort and day-to-day disruption incurred in delivering the outcome.

Categorisation of project success

	Unacceptable cost, effort, disruption	Acceptable cost, effort, disruption
Objectives fully delivered	*'We got there in the end, but it was much too hard'*	*'The holy grail'*
Objectives not delivered	*'Never again!'*	*'Didn't live up to the promises'*

There are projects that deliver as intended, often below the radar of wider comment, at an acceptable cost – the top right quadrant. Notably many estates projects fit into this group – in spite of their complexity and cost.

Occasionally, change initiatives fit into the lower left quadrant – outright failure. Sometimes the response to proposed changes deteriorates into acrimony which makes positions untenable: for example Sir John Hood,

Vice-Chancellor at the University of Oxford and Peter Horrocks, Vice-Chancellor at The Open University both left their posts following very problematic and public attempts to introduce change.[8] There have also been some very high-profile problems with the implementation of large IT systems – for example the introduction of Campus Solutions at Nottingham that led to a public apology from leaders to staff and students for the disruptions and poor service quality they had experienced.[9]

In practice, however, most change initiatives fall somewhere between these extremes and end in a spirit of relief at finishing rather than celebration of what was achieved. These sit either in the top left of the diagram – more or less delivering but taking too long, costing too much or being too disruptive – or the bottom right – perhaps delivering some benefit but less than was originally promised. A notable feature of the last group is the tendency to make an impact which then rapidly decays over time; cost reduction projects are particularly prone to this as they often make an immediate saving only for costs to rise again once attention is turned elsewhere.

That suggests the benefits of delivering change more effectively could be substantial for institutions – both by avoiding the occasional disasters and by improving the outcomes of the many projects that, while not outright failures, could be so much better. Benefits could be in terms of better outcomes (academic, experiential or financial), saved time, less disruption, lower delivery costs and improved morale.

Why is change so hard?

> *'…there is nothing more difficult to take in hand, more perilous to conduct, or more uncertain in its success, than to take the lead in the introduction of a new order of things'.*
>
> Niccolò Machiavelli[10]

The criticisms of change within universities generally come from different and competing angles, often at the same time. Some may believe change is unnecessary. Others will admit change is necessary (perhaps urgently), but that the proposed solution is the wrong one. Some will say it is being implemented too quickly, others too slowly. Cost overruns and disruption caused by change are other frequent complaints. And perhaps the most frequent criticism is that change does not live up to what was promised for it – either in the hype from those charged with leading it or in the carefully

crafted statement of benefits that was used to ensure its passage through whichever governance forum took the decision to go ahead with it.

It is not uncommon, after (or sometimes during) a change initiative that is seen as less than a wholehearted success, to conduct a review to determine what went wrong. The lessons emanating from such exercises can be depressingly similar each time. Some of the usual suspects in such lessons learned exercises are shown in the table below.

Table 1: Observed causes of project failure

Observed symptom	Typical root cause
No shared understanding of why change is necessary	Lack of clearly articulated case for change Project was framed to procure a technology solution, rather than solve a problem
Even if need for change is accepted, specific approach is not agreed	No (or poor) rationale for how the change will be achieved Failure to make the case for the approach
Multiple and competing objectives from the change	Lack of clearly articulated vision Poor governance
Lack of senior sponsorship	Lack of belief from the leadership Unwillingness of leaders to make the case
Change resistance	Insufficient focus on getting opinion formers to advocate for the change
Poor or slow decision making	Insufficient or poor governance Disempowered decision makers
Scope creep	Poor governance Poor definition of scope – either too loose or too rigid
Delayed delivery	Unrealistic planning Lack of prioritisation Insufficient or inappropriate delivery resources Failure to take account of, and manage, risks

Cost overruns	Over-optimistic project costing and planning Ineffective risk management
Failure fully to meet objectives (real or perceived)	Success not clearly defined Overly ambitious objectives and over-egged benefits Focus on technology change not people Failure to revisit assumptions in response to changed circumstances
Unacceptable disruption	Poor planning – either too loose or too rigid Failure to understand the people impacts of change Insufficient engagement with impacted staff Failure to plan for teething problems

If the familiarity of this list is depressing, the extent to which many of them are avoidable is surely equally concerning. Almost none of the above list of root causes are things which simply could not have been predicted and controlled in advance. In a few instances, there have been change projects that failed because of some external event that would have been very hard to predict (the COVID lockdowns, for example) but experience suggests that in normal times, this is quite rare. In most cases, problems that have arisen could have been expected given the route the change initiative had embarked upon.

It follows from this that the *design* of the change needs to be undertaken in a way that takes account of possible future problems so that, as far as possible, they are avoided rather than remedied later. This is explored further in Chapter 3.

Is change harder in universities than anywhere else?

> *'[A university is] a series of individual faculty entrepreneurs held together by a common grievance over parking.'*
>
> Professor Clark Kerr, Chancellor of the University of California (1958-67)[11]

This paper is concerned with delivering change specifically in universities. Before moving to suggested solutions, it is worth considering whether making

change happen in universities is any different to doing so anywhere else.

There is a widely quoted statistic that 70 per cent of change initiatives fail across all types of business. In spite of appearing in almost every piece of writing about making change happen within organisations (this one now included), and often being cited as an immutable truth, there is, as Mark Hughes at the University of Brighton has demonstrated, actually no objective data whatsoever to support it.[12] However, its repeated use – often unchallenged – represents an interesting reflection on the widely held belief that change in organisations is hard to achieve.

Much has been written about the difficulties of making change happen in government. Notable figures from Tony Blair to Dominic Cummings (via Jim Hacker) have said that the way government operates seems designed to thwart change at every level.[13] And there are many examples from the private sector too; Lou Gerstner's book describing the challenges of turning the oil tanker that was IBM when he was its CEO is a good example of the difficulties involved in making change happen in a corporate environment.[14]

So change is hard – in any sector. It is difficult to state categorically that it is harder (or easier) in universities than anywhere else – the notion that public bodies and not-for-profit entities cannot exhibit innovation has been convincingly refuted by Marianne Mazzucato and others.[15] But there are some particular features of higher education that bring specific challenges which need to be acknowledged by those charged with delivering change in universities. Ewart Wooldridge, formerly Chief Executive of the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education, makes a convincing case that universities have traditionally lacked the culture to make change happen – arguing that change can only happen by fostering the right human behaviours.[16]

Some higher education specific challenges are set out below.

Governance built for consensus not speed

By their very nature, academic communities are collegiate and consensual. In many respects, this is a key part of what makes universities the institutions they are, but it can also lead to governance paralysis and sclerotic decision making which undermines the agency that staff need in order to deliver change.

A particular issue in universities is what I have termed 'red flag raising'. This is the phenomenon whereby individuals or committees with no immediate interest in an issue seem to be empowered to stop progress in its tracks –

by raising a red flag – but are not held to account for the consequences of the decision not to proceed. This phenomenon is not unique to universities but will be all too well-known to many in the sector.

Overcautious attitude to risk

Traditionally, universities have been risk averse. The ideas about risk management developed in the corporate world have often been reinterpreted in universities as risk avoidance. There is no doubt that is changing – over recent years, universities have developed more mature approaches in which they see risk as something to be mitigated, managed and sometimes accepted rather than always removed, but there sometimes remains an unwillingness even to contemplate risky change.

Successful change requires a solid understanding of where risks are, how they can be managed and when they should be accepted if the reward is worth it. Dr Adam Shore of Liverpool John Moores University has argued persuasively in a HEPI blog that taking risk, and the inevitable negative outcomes that will sometimes result, must be regarded as a legitimate opportunity to learn and not as the beginning of a process of apportioning blame.[17] The maxim 'fail early, fail often' is a defining principle of many a business start-up.[18]

Decentralised control

University leaders, particularly in older institutions, will recognise the frustration of being unable to make change happen even when the decision to do so has been made by all the appropriate governance structures. The decentralised power of many (though by no means all) universities means there can be barriers to pursuing a course of action – certainly compared to most private sector organisations. It is reasonable to point out that there may be good reasons for this: the ability of a group of scholars to take decisions around their own discipline is cited as the means by which academic strength is built. But it is equally important to recognise that such decentralisation may be detrimental to delivering positive change.

The 'tyranny of the status quo'

> *'There are hazards in anything one does but there are greater hazards in doing nothing'.*
>
> Shirley Williams, Baroness Williams of Crosby[19]

University change leaders often find themselves responding to calls for more data to prove that a particular change is the right course of action – that is perhaps a direct consequence of the academic mindset which requires evidence to be created in order to prove or disprove a hypothesis. But the demand for ever-more evidence can ignore the fact that there is a similar lack of data to support the status quo. It may even be there is evidence to support the notion that the status quo is a worse solution than *whatever* might follow. I term this the 'tyranny of the status quo' which sometimes allows clearly poor solutions to remain in place while an argument continues about which is the best replacement. As Clark Kerr put it, 'the status quo is the only solution that cannot be vetoed'.[20]

None of the above reasons for why change is particularly challenging in universities should be read as criticisms of higher education institutions. Universities are what they are – often for very good reasons – and it is unproductive to wish it was otherwise to suit the needs of a change project. However, these factors should be taken into account in the design of the way change is delivered. For leaders, that means knowing when to let matters take their own course and when to challenge, when to apply carrot and when to apply stick.

The design of change projects is discussed in the next chapter.

3. How to design change better

> *'First, have a definite, clear practical ideal; a goal, an objective. Second, have the necessary means to achieve your ends; wisdom, money, materials, and methods. Third, adjust all your means to that end'.*
>
> Aristotle[21]

The previous chapter set out experience of what makes delivering change in universities hard to do. This chapter posits the idea that many of the reasons that lead to less than full success from change can be overcome by better design of the change itself.

It is important here to distinguish between the design of the change and the design of the solution that will be implemented as a result of the change project. Many projects will invest considerable time in designing a solution – coming up with, for example, the perceived optimum organisational model for academic departments and professional services, or the ideal processes to support admissions. That is, of course, important but is not the subject of what follows. Rather, the focus here is on the design of the way the change will be delivered – how the journey from the current state to the desired future state will be achieved and what conditions need to be put in place in order to maximise the likelihood of a successful outcome.

A scheme for change

Typically, change projects are initiated because someone senior identifies a need for something different. Some form of business case is then written – usually with the emphasis on securing the necessary funding rather than on answering questions about how success will be achieved. Following that, the focus moves to creation of a project plan, often running to hundreds of activities with dependencies and resource requirements all neatly mapped. Risk logs, stakeholder maps and much else then follow – often all bundled up into something called a Project Initiation Document (PID). Once the PID is approved by the appropriate project board or investment committee, the project team is assembled and work begins.

But rarely, in my experience, does this approach answer the key questions that will set the project off on the right footing. Often there is little real clarity about why the change is needed, what will replace the status quo or why that option has been chosen among the others that might be available. Most of all, there is rarely a clear and agreed understanding of

how successful change will be achieved. Without these fundamentals agreed, success will at best be a chance outcome.

In the rest of this paper the term 'Scheme for Change' is used to denote the overall design of any change and how it will be delivered. A Scheme for Change must broadly answer five questions:

- Why is the change necessary?
- What will replace the status quo?
- How will the move from the status quo to the future state be achieved?
- What change delivery model will be employed?
- What would success look like?

None of what follows should be seen as prescriptive – the Scheme for Change might be very simple and documented in just a few pages, or might be a suite of detailed documents, depending on the scale and complexity of the change. It is important, however, to ensure that each question can be answered – and critically, that those answers are agreed by university leaders and those charged with delivering the change.

It will be noted that none of the five questions is specifically about how people are impacted by the change and how staff, students and others can be engaged. That is not because those people issues are not important. Rather, the opposite is true – each of the questions is fundamentally about people and, as will be seen in the explanations that follow, the answers to all of them must deal with the human impacts of change and the perceptions, motivations and reactions of everyone involved.

Suggestions for how each of the five questions can best be answered are set out in the rest of this chapter.

Question 1: Why is the change necessary?

My experience is that senior sponsors of change projects will often comment that the need for change is 'self-evident' or 'plain for all to see'. Yet, as noted in the previous chapter, reviews of projects that have not delivered as anticipated frequently cite the lack of an agreed case for change as a cause – suggesting that one person's 'self-evident' may be another's 'completely opaque'.

It is critical that the case for change should be discussed and agreed among the sponsoring leaders, the team that will be responsible for delivery, and

those impacted by the change. This means identifying the root causes of current problems (not just the symptoms) and being able to set out what the impacts of those problems are – in financial and / or non-financial terms.

Experience shows it is much easier to demonstrate a case for change when there is a problem that is existential to the university. The term 'burning platform' has become something of a cliché but is a good analogy for a problem that simply cannot be ignored. Of course ideally, early action should be taken before a problem becomes existential – better to fireproof the platform than wait until it catches fire.

Even a burning platform needs to be clearly explained. In her HEPI paper about delivering transformation at the University of Hull, Professor Susan Lea sets out the lengths she needed to go to present the criticality of the challenges the university faced in order to pave the way for major change.[22]

Different elements of the case for change may resonate to different groups. Take, as an example, a project to replace a student records system. The case for change for staff using the system is likely to be that the current system involves time consuming manual workarounds and does not integrate with other systems. For students, the case for change might be the current lack of ability to self-serve student information. In the IT department, they might be more concerned about the age of the current system that is, perhaps, long out of support from its supplier and at severe risk of major failure. For university leaders, the case for change might be a currently unmet need for real-time information on student performance. And meanwhile there could be another set of concerns that the current system is wide open to cyber-attack or is not GDPR compliant.

While different elements of the case for change may be important to different people, the case for change should nevertheless be articulated as a coherent whole rather than as a list of unconnected ideas aimed at different groups of people.

It is often helpful to set out the case for change in visionary language to describe what could be better and how that will benefit the university, its students and its staff. This needs to be done carefully though; many of us will have seen unintentionally comic claims that a change to, for example, minor administrative processes will somehow deliver a spectacular benefit to students, the university or the planet. Depending on the nature of the change, it is worth getting the communications experts to think about how best to take the case for change to the university – written documents, information cascades, roadshows, websites and videos can all be useful.

Question 2: What will replace the status quo?

Having established that change is necessary, the next question addresses which option for the future state should be put in place of the status quo, and why the chosen option is best.

This must set down clearly what the change is designed to achieve (which will of course refer back to the case for change) and then test each potential solution against those objectives. It is often useful to outline a set of 'design tests' which can be used to assess each potential future option. For example, design tests for a new approach to engaging with alumni might be:

- Allow content delivery to alumni through multiple channels;
- Support alumni event booking;
- Facilitate inter-alumni online forums;
- Allow general fundraising campaigns;
- Enable targeted engagement with potential major donors;
- Manage alumni details and be GDPR compliant;
- Reduce manual work by alumni engagement staff; and
- Provide value-for-money.

The various options for technology and staffing solutions that could be utilised can then be assessed against each design test so a choice can be made. Part of this should be a financial analysis to test the value-for-money of the change.

The extent of analysis needed to support question 2 will vary according to the context. Where there is a large capital spend or a major organisational change, a fully worked-up business case would be expected, with detailed options appraisal, financial analysis and net present value modelling. Changes that are smaller in scope would have appropriately less detail, but the need to answer credibly questions about what the change will put in place, and why that option is better than any other, will always be a fundamental building block of the Scheme for Change.

It is worth noting the importance of defining the future state in terms of outcomes rather than detailed inputs, especially where the change will rely on an external procurement. In the above example of a new approach to engaging with alumni, it is likely a new packaged software product will be required; the future state should therefore be defined in terms of the outcomes that are required so that potentially very different software solutions can be considered.

Question 3: How will the move from the status quo to the future state be achieved?

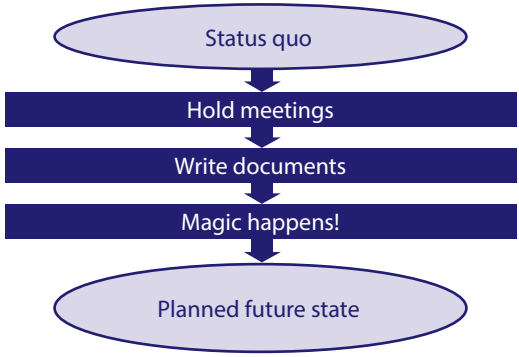
Many change projects – even those which fail – may have answered the first two questions at least to some extent. However, experience shows the next two are often answered, if at all, by relatively junior project staff and are not the subject of explicit decision making through the designated governance. These questions deal with the means by which the change will be delivered.

The third question deals with what might be termed the 'change logic'. Any change should be based on a chain of logic that builds from the status quo to the proposed new state with steps in between which, taken together, will logically result in the required outcome.

This idea calls on the concepts inherent in the *Theory of Change* view of policy delivery. This was developed by Carol Weiss and others in the 1990s as an approach to understanding how major public policy changes could be implemented without encountering the unintended consequences and missed targets that bedevil such initiatives.[23] The thinking was developed in relation to public policy but can usefully be applied to changes within an organisation too. There is much terminology used by Theory of Change practitioners but I have avoided that here (not least because the various writers on the subject do not use it consistently) and for simplicity refer only to my own term already introduced above – change logic.

To a sceptical observer, the change logic behind many university change projects appears to go something like this:

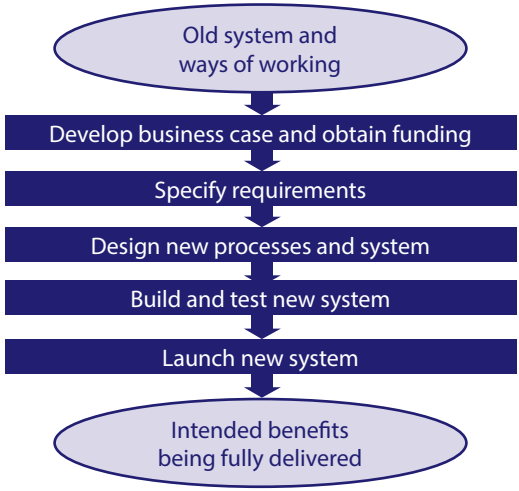
Perception of a generic change logic



That may be a caricature but will be familiar to many. So often, the change logic has never been specified and the assumption seems to be that a set of activities in the plan will necessarily result in the required outcome because they are well-intentioned rather than because there is a clear logical progression between them.

By way of a more specific (and less flippant) illustration, consider the change logic which sits behind many projects designed to implement a new IT system. Although often unstated, it is likely to be something like this:

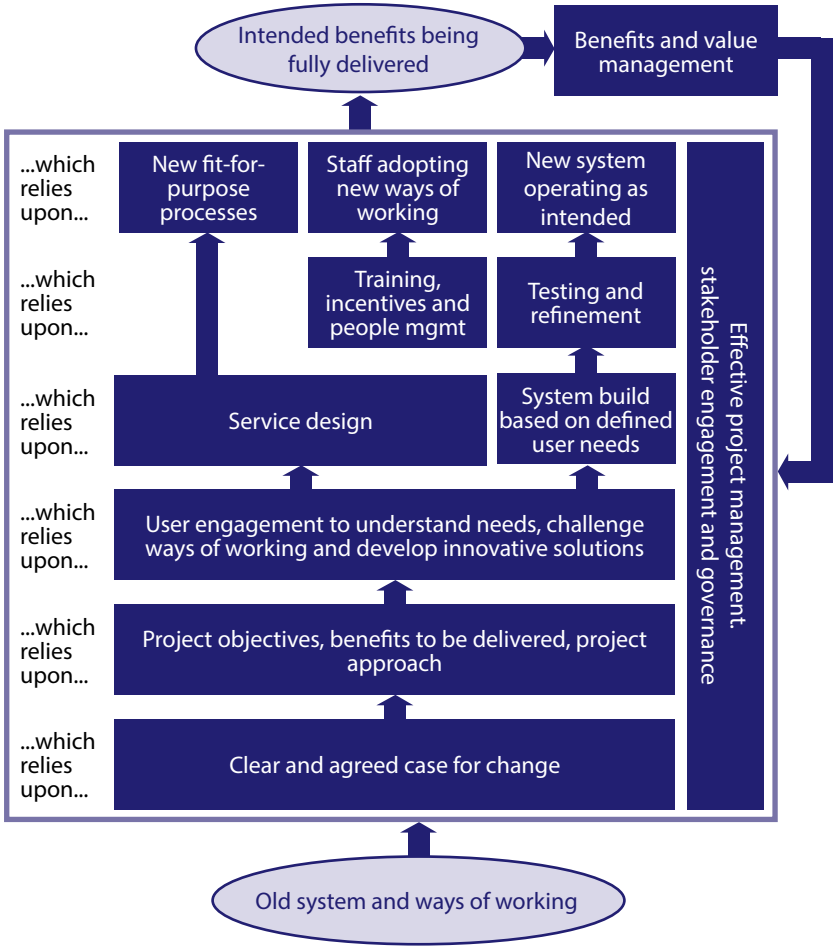
Typical unstated change logic for an IT system implementation



Even at this summary level, the errors in logic in such a flow are obvious: it is by no means certain the new system will deliver what is needed based on those steps. There are no feedback loops to ensure the system will deliver what users need, there is no certainty at all that the people involved have bought into the system and will use it as intended, and there is no mention of how and when key benefits will be assured or value-for-money achieved.

Thinking through the change logic produces a different view of the same IT project. It involves starting with the planned future state and working out what needs to have happened for that to be delivered, step-by-step back to the current state – hence the next diagram is presented the other way up with the new system at the top. The change logic view of the same project might look like this:

Illustrative improved change logic for same IT project



Of course, this version still raises questions which need a lower level of detail to answer. But asking those more detailed questions is a helpful exercise as it forces the project to think through in detail how the change will be achieved. Having this clear view of the logical steps matters: it will almost certainly lead to a different project plan and a different view of what is important.

The list of potential threats to the validity of the change logic – assumptions made, uncertainties, dependencies on external factors and so on – should also be defined. These will later become the list of risks to be managed throughout delivery.

Question 4: What change delivery model will be employed?

Question 4, like question 3, is rarely explicitly discussed. But the need to establish how the change will be *managed* is critical. Set out below are seven key design decisions required in order to be confident that the model to be used for managing the change is understood and agreed.

i) How fast should we go?

> *'What is right to be done cannot be done too soon.'*
>
> Jane Austen[24]
>
> *'Speed is irrelevant if you are going in the wrong direction.'*
>
> Mahatma Gandhi[25]
>
> *'Speed has never killed anyone. Suddenly becoming stationary, that's what gets you.'*
>
> Jeremy Clarkson[26]

As mentioned in Chapter 2, speed of delivery – either too fast or too slow – is one of the most commonly cited reasons for unhappiness with the results of change projects. As a consultant working with universities, I frequently heard – often simultaneously – that projects were being rushed or were taking too long. There is no simple answer to the question of pace as there are genuine reasons to prefer both ends of the spectrum.

Advantages of delivering quickly	Advantages of delivering slowly
• Delivers valuable benefits to the institution, staff and students sooner rather than later	• Reduces risk of rushing to implement an ill-considered solution – 'better to implement the right thing slowly than the wrong thing quickly'

• Reduces likelihood that any entire cohort misses out on benefits subject to the annual academic cycle (such as admissions, clearing or year-end assessment) • Avoids 'change fatigue' – feeling change is ever-present • Can reduce costs of delivery – for example, the cost of maintaining a project management team is in direct proportion to the length of the project • Allows the creation of a strong delivery narrative to support change efforts – 'make a plan, deliver quickly, achieve results, move on'	• Allows time for consultation and discussion with staff and students who will be affected by the change – to permit building a consensus about the case for change and the proposed solution • Can reduce costs of delivery by allowing staff to implement change around their day jobs rather than requiring dedicated resource • Allows creation of a strong delivery narrative to support change efforts – 'deliberate well-thought-through change at a pace staff can cope with'

While, then, there is no simple answer to the question of whether rapid and risky is better than slow and sure, there are a number of points to bear in mind when making the decision:

- No one wants change projects that seem to be around forever; generally 18 months is the maximum period for which anyone can keep the faith. Capital development projects – and some major IT and organisational change projects – may take longer, but even they can be broken up into shorter projects.
- Breaking change initiatives into manageable chunks with shorter deadlines is usually an effective way of way of delivering at pace. But it needs to be done with care: a project can only be deemed to be completed (and its success celebrated) when something useful has been delivered – when benefits that would be recognised outside the project team are real. So projects with titles like 'programme scoping' or 'as-is process mapping' fail the test – if such activities are necessary, they are merely initial stages of a larger project rather than defined projects in their own right.

- It is instructive to ask the question about what is constraining a project from moving faster. Sometimes there will be valid reasons – the need to test new software thoroughly is a good example. But if the reason is something vague like 'resource overload' there is a need to delve into what the constraint really is and consider how it can be removed. Often, a constraint may be overcome with a relatively small amount of targeted resource into an area with a bottleneck – HR for example, where changes to role descriptions are required. Sometimes the only real constraint is the capacity of senior management to oversee multiple change projects in parallel; the solution may be as simple as delegating some of the oversight to the next layer down.
- Sometimes slowness is simply because too much change is happening in parallel. A survey by PA Consulting found many universities were operating over 100 substantive change projects with several running closer to 200.[27] The solution to this problem is to prioritise ruthlessly and do a smaller number of things quickly, then move on to something else. That is simple in theory but very tough in practice since it inevitably involves ceasing work – for the time being at least – on a change initiative which has a sound business case and will deliver important benefits but is not quite as important as something else.

ii) Top-down or bottom-up?

There is a choice to be made about whether change should be driven top-down or enabled bottom-up. As with the question of pace, there is no right or wrong answer, but similarly there is a need to be pro-active in making a decision about which is preferred given the circumstances involved, rather than allowing the decision to be made by default.

Many change initiatives involve the development of a large number of relatively small-scale improvements. Efficiency improvement initiatives are a particular example of this kind of project, whereby significant benefits can be achieved overall by the cumulative effect of many small changes to business processes. Projects to improve the student experience are often similar. These projects are particularly suited to a bottom-up approach. Staff performing a function are often very well aware how it can be made more effective, cheaper or both, but feel constrained from implementing the necessary changes. Freeing up this latent dynamic for innovation by giving staff the time and permission to drive change can sometimes be an excellent way of making improvements happen. Such an approach of 'letting a thousand flowers bloom' fits well with a strategy of empowering staff and trusting them to do what is right while pushing for continuous improvement.

Such bottom-up change does, however, have its drawbacks. Projects of this kind can sometimes leave university leaders with the feeling that, while each individual change may represent an improvement, the totality lacks coherence and direction such that the outcome is somehow less than the sum of its parts. At the very least, some kind of unifying vision and a set of constraints on what is possible will be required.

The opposite approach is to drive change top-down. In this scenario, a central design team, answerable directly to the university leadership, defines the solution, sets the schedule and tries to force change through the organisation. Leaders can have greater confidence using this approach that the changes envisaged constitute a coherent whole and will be enacted as intended. At least elements of this approach are inevitable when there is a large capital spend – on IT systems or estates for example – when a single unified set of changes are necessary.

Centrally directed change is sometimes necessary where the objective will be unpopular and likely to be resisted. Projects that involve redundancies and major changes to staff roles can only happen through a centrally managed process. In such circumstances, the organisation is probably best served by leaders who stand up, define the change, make it happen and move beyond the unpleasantness as quickly as possible.

But top-down change also has its drawbacks, not least that many university leaders feel they lack the levers to make it happen: plans for change defined from on high are often simply ignored. Even when that is not the case, the sense of disempowerment among staff who feel they have been told rather than listened to, may be so great that the change never gains full traction and fails to realise its potential. One vice-chancellor commented to me that while they were attracted to a top-down approach, a bottom-up method which constituted 'change by stealth' was the only workable option.

In practice, most change projects are best served by balancing the top-down with the bottom-up – employing elements of both to seek a sweet spot for managing delivery that is effective. Just like with speed of delivery, this approach should be the result of an explicit choice rather than an unvoiced assumption.

iii) Is there the capability necessary to deliver the change?

Determining what staff are required, must, of course, be a part of the costing of a change project. In addition, the Scheme for Change needs to consider where these people will come from – are they in-house or will they need to be recruited externally; if they are in-house, will they need

replacement 'backfill' resource to free up their time; what specialist skills are required?

Many universities have built their own specialist internal change teams. PA Consulting's research finds these teams, while maturing and improving, vary considerably.[28] Some have a purely IT focus; others are central functions designed to keep track of projects being managed elsewhere; others are central repositories for tools and templates; a few are highly skilled project delivery functions with the capability and capacity to deliver projects themselves. Understanding the nature of the resource and how it will be deployed is an important element of the design.

iv) Portfolio, programme or project?

There is much written about the difference between portfolios, programmes and projects.[29] In summary, projects are time-bound, based on the production and acceptance of a set of deliverables, and aimed at achieving an objective. Programmes are generally groups of projects with complex dependencies between them, are more complex and are aimed at achieving benefits rather than just deliverables. Finally, portfolios are looser collections of projects and programmes that have common themes but fewer dependencies and are aimed at achieving an organisational strategy.

In fact, universities use the three terms rather more interchangeably than those definitions suggest. Sometimes, what is really a project is called a programme simply because the person leading it gains a greater position of importance and seniority from that term. In practice, the title used is probably merely semantic, but it is nevertheless critical that the university has the ability to co-ordinate its change activities to deliver a successful set of outcomes. There are all too frequent examples of, for instance, HR moving to a decentralised model of support to academic departments just at the point when Finance is centralising to a shared service model. And many an IT systems project has come unstuck when it emerges that the staff cannot be trained in using the newly installed system because the organisational development team is busy with other priorities set by the vice-chancellor.

Precisely how a university seeks to control and manage its array of change initiatives will depend upon how far-reaching the changes are and the extent to which they form part of a grand plan, as opposed to a series of unconnected ideas.

There has been a trend in the last decade or so for universities to bring connected change initiatives together into an overarching programme.

The programme is sometimes given a personality of its own – a brand, dedicated staff, a budget and communication channels. Among many others, UCL had *TOPS* (Transforming Our Professional Services), Durham had *Durham DOES* (Delivering Operational Excellence Strategy) and the University of the Arts London, Royal Holloway, University of London and the University of Central Lancashire each had their own *Student First* programme. Such programmes have been useful ways of corralling activity, prioritising effort and managing scarce resources but have not always been well-received across their host institutions. The programme itself – rather than the positive outcomes it is seeking to deliver – can easily become the focus of a discussion about perceived managerial excess. A clever brand name provides a focus but can be a hostage to fortune as wags will seek puns on them to make a point – *Student First* readily becomes *Student Last*!

There are, however, examples of change initiatives continuing to deliver in the long-term. What became known as the *Melbourne Model* – the approach to transforming the curriculum at the University of Melbourne – was supported by a structured programme of activity for more than a decade.[30]

More recently, universities have favoured more portfolio-type approaches. In this model, an overview of the array of change initiatives is maintained – perhaps by a governance entity called something like a Strategic Transformation Board. Common approaches to project management are used and there is an agreed process for securing funding and monitoring benefits realisation, but there is no central programme team or delivery plan. Such approaches can, if used effectively, deliver the benefits of central co-ordination without the downsides of a branded programme.

v) Who needs to be involved?

> *'The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place'.*
>
> George Bernard Shaw[31]

The next element of the design is to agree who needs to be engaged along the way. Unlike some of the preceding decisions, this is one that often gets significant design attention. Project management professionals will often spend many happy hours drawing up stakeholder maps, plotting levels of influence and defining engagement strategies. These can then be used to initiate a myriad of one-to-one meetings, workshops, roadshows,

roundtables, online discussions, websites, newsletters and video messages.

Depending on the scale and nature of the change such activity can be very useful. One of the most important outputs is the segmentation of individuals and groups into those who make decisions, those who need to have an influence on the design, those who can be advocates, those who will oppose and so on. It is generally worth looking hard at this analysis – there is a tendency for universities to adopt consultation that seeks views from a large number of people but at a superficial level. Deeper consultation with a smaller group whose views really matter may be more valuable, but it needs to be accompanied by broadcast communication to a much wider group.

vi) What project management approach should be adopted?

Approaches to project management have been fundamentally affected by the emergence in the last few years of the agile method. This arose in the software development industry as a response to the perceived failures of more traditional 'waterfall' approaches to software development in which linear phases of activity identified user needs, built a system, tested it and then released it into live usage in a complete and fully functional state.[32]

By contrast, the agile method takes an iterative approach whereby delivery is broken down into small increments, each delivered by a close-knit cross-functional team. Each increment is planned as the last one completes with the intention to release an initial version of the software as soon as possible (termed a 'minimum viable product'). Further iterations will then develop this initial release.[33]

The agile method has appealed to many organisations – including some universities.[34] Increasingly, the method is being applied to a wide range of projects beyond merely software development – internal change, new organisational structures and even construction projects. The iterative approach is seen as avoiding the trap of setting in motion a project that delivers to a specification that is at best long out-of-date by the time it is finished, and at worst never fully grasped the real requirement, which could only ever be understood in practice not on paper. Many teams have enjoyed agile delivery as it is highly collaborative and focuses on short-term achievable aims rather than nebulous distant goals. Agile is also praised because, by delivering value along the way and not just at the end, it improves benefits management.

But agile also has its detractors, not least because the evidential basis for the achievements lauded by its followers is somewhat lacking. University

leaders worry about their lack of control – it is sometimes likened to assembling the members of a project team then leaving them to do as they please. Some are put off agile by its use of a language that only its true disciples can speak – talk of scrum masters, sprints, product owners, retrospectives and kanbans can seem designed to exclude anyone who has 'not been on the course' and to make relatively simple ideas appear cleverer than they are.

Many universities are increasingly seeking a middle way – using many of the concepts from agile delivery while not slavishly following every element of it. In particular, the idea of breaking complex projects down into short discrete increments, each of which a small team is tasked with delivering, has gained traction. That allows the design of solutions to be evolved as the work goes on, in response to an understanding of what works.

Like the other decisions in this chapter, there is no right or wrong in the choice of whether to adopt waterfall, agile or one of the many points in between. But the leadership of the project should make an explicit decision about its approach in the light of an understanding of the options.

vii) What project governance is needed?

> *'The most difficult thing is the decision to act, the rest is merely tenacity'.*
>
> Ameila Earhart[35]

The final element of the change delivery model to be designed is the approach to governance. It is widely accepted that universities need good project governance and many have now established their own governance models – pre-determined approaches to how change projects should be governed depending on their size, risk profile and reach.

Again, the important point here is that a deliberate decision is required rather than drifting towards a default approach. In designing the governance model, the following factors need to be borne in mind:

- The right people must be involved. The individuals who make up the steering group, project board or whatever it may be called, must have the right skills for the role. They must also have capacity – governance, especially at key points, requires individuals who can devote time to the task.

- The governance must be empowered. A governance group that is asked to, say, sign off a delivery approach but feels it has to refer that to higher authority is essentially useless – nothing is lost by cutting out the lower level. That does not mean that layered governance cannot be useful, but it does require each layer to have a clearly differentiated function. As an example, a top governance layer may be accountable for agreeing the funding envelope within which a project operates, while the lower level should agree the detailed budget.
- Governance must be clearly understood. The role of each level of governance – its purpose, its terms of reference and its scope – must be documented. In bigger projects, it is often effective to create governance entities with a specific role. A design authority, for example, is a governance forum with the specific task of owning the design for the future state (as set out in question 2 above) – agreeing any changes and ensuring that what is built conforms to the design. Similarly a risk management board or a benefits delivery board may be helpful in achieving a focus on the issues that matter – but only if their roles are clearly articulated and distinguished from the other forums in use.
- Those charged with governance must receive the information they need. Governance can only be effective if it is based on accurate, timely and relevant information about the status of the project and its costs, benefits and risks. Above all that means that the project team must be open and transparent with governance forums – hiding problems is never helpful. It is up to those in governance roles to ensure that openness is always the prevailing culture.

It is important not to confuse *more* governance with *better* governance: over-governance can be as much of a problem as under-governance. Many project teams will be familiar with the feeling that 'feeding the governance machine' takes up more time than delivering the change. A small but fit-for-purpose and empowered decision-making forum may be all that is needed for some changes.

As noted previously, prioritisation in the face of constraints of time, money and management attention is critical. Good governance should enable this – balancing the demands of competing activities in order to target resources and sequence effort appropriately.

Question 5: What would success look like?

> *'However beautiful the strategy, you should occasionally look at the results'.*
>
> Winston S. Churchill[36]

As a consultant entering an existing change initiative, I would generally ask organisational leaders whether there was a clear understanding of what conditions would be deemed a success when the project ended. The reply would usually be in the affirmative. But asking them each – separately – to articulate their view of success would frequently reveal they held widely varying definitions of success, each equally convinced that their view was shared by their colleagues.

The final element of the Scheme for Change is therefore a definition of success – the circumstances that would need to pertain to allow the organisation to declare victory. Defining this needs to involve senior leaders – in particular those who will, in due course, hold the project to account for its success (or otherwise).

The definition of success should be closely linked to the case for change and design of the future state (questions 1 and 2 above). It must be centred around a list of proposed benefits – but it should be more than that. It should be a clear statement of how things will be different, and who will experience that difference – in the event that the project is a success. There are various ways of presenting this – text, pictures, web content and so on. One technique which works well is to draft a blog written as if it was some point in the future when the work is already successfully completed, reviewing its achievements and benefits.

Benefits management

Projects often focus on benefits management only when the project is almost complete. That is an effective way of monitoring whether success has been achieved but is likely to be too late to do anything to remedy the situation if it has not. Instead, benefits management should be addressed from the very start – even before delivery has started.

The benefits management function (whether a team, a role, or part of a role – depending on the scale of the project) should become the conscience of the project. It should repeatedly question whether everything the project is doing is squarely focused on delivering success. That is not to say that the success definition cannot evolve over time; it should change

as circumstances change, but must do so in a controlled way that allows leaders to be assured the project remains relevant and worthwhile.

There are many useful approaches to benefits management containing a wealth of tools and templates for benefit identification, mapping, monitoring and reporting. The Universities and Colleges Information Systems Association (UCISA) has its own model, tailored to the domains in which its members work.[37]

The most comprehensive guide to how actually to measure benefits in a university was written by Heather Lawrence and Nicola Cairns of the University of Strathclyde.[38] This contains both a wealth of practical tools for evidencing benefits and a range of case studies.

The key to making benefits management work in practice is to remember it is about people and behaviour not just systems and processes. Benefits can be measured empirically, but perception is also key. Any initiative designed to introduce changes that will enhance the student experience, for example, are likely to involve benefits that are evidenced through the National Student Survey or other survey tools. Such surveys measure subjective student perceptions which are influenced by a range of factors, not just the factor which is the target of the change project being considered.

4. Changing how to change

> *'People don't resist change. They resist being changed!'*
>
> Peter Senge[39]

This paper has sought to show how my experience is that investing effort in a well-thought through design for how change will be delivered – a Scheme for Change – is the key to achieving results.

However, any change endeavour can only succeed if those leading it keep in mind that change is fundamentally about people and behaviour. Strategy, processes, systems and rules will be important but will always be trumped by culture, relationships, motivations and perceptions. That gives rise to three concluding thoughts that should shape the Scheme for Change.

Change fatigue

I have often been told that staff in universities are over-burdened with change. 'Change fatigue', goes the story, has taken root and will preclude any further change.

The simple answer to this is to return to the thoughts of Heraclitus cited at the start of this paper – change is a constant so there is no choice. While that may be true, a more empathetic reaction is probably called for. Professor Susan Lea makes the point in her account of her experience of driving change in the University of Hull, that staff were clear they were weary only of change that did not work; effective change was what they wanted.[40]

A useful response to counter talk of 'change fatigue' is what I call 'status quo fatigue' – the stultifying impact of having to deal with ways of working, systems and structures that you know to be far from optimal. Staff involved in, for example, hiring new employees may well not relish the prospect of a change to a new HR system, but the thought of being liberated from time-consuming and error-prone manual processes may be distinctly more attractive.

It is rarely sensible to miss or delay the opportunity of implementing valuable change simply because staff have been involved in other changes before. Finding a different approach to delivery – which recognises the motivations and perceptions of staff – will almost always be a better approach.

Resistance to change

Designing the change to avoid or overcome resistance was mentioned in Chapter 3. But even after careful consultation and consideration of all viewpoints, resistance is unlikely to be wholly eliminated: even the most successful changes have had to overcome dissenting voices along the way. It is worth remembering that even if resistance is loud, it may not be representative: a small number of people can be disproportionately vocal.

The solution to dealing with resistance is not to seek to eliminate it entirely, but to ensure that support for the change is sufficient to outweigh the resistance. Once a tipping point is reached, resistance can be swept along by the momentum as staff move along the so-called 'change curve' (the stages of reaction to organisational change typically experienced by individuals: shock, denial, frustration, depression, experiment, decision and integration).[41]

My experience is in any case that resistance can be reduced by the simple expedient of arguing the case. The normal reaction of academic staff (and by cultural extension, the professional services staff who work around them) when confronted with a proposition is to seek to argue a counter proposition as a means of testing it and establishing the truth. Engaging with the debate, rather than avoiding it, is likely to be the best means of convincing the doubters.

Managerialism

Throughout my career working with universities, I have been exposed to the criticism that change projects are simply a product of the managerialism that has beset the higher education sector in the recent past. Overpaid managers and consultants, the argument goes, fail to appreciate what really happens at the coalface of teaching and research so cannot understand how a university works. This argument seems curiously unchanged even when academic staff are heavily involved in project design and delivery.

Some staff – particularly, but no means exclusively, academic staff – are very keen to critique the use of any kind of business jargon to describe what they do (conveniently forgetting that almost all business jargon was invented by academics in business schools not by practitioners like me!). So it is a good idea to avoid the excesses of jargon – suggesting 'the creation of corporate competency to champion a new holistic enabling paradigm' is likely to be met with a blank stare at best and laughter at worst. Sometimes though, some jargon is necessary to ensure precision – as in any discipline.

More broadly, I have always been unapologetic about the need to apply business disciplines to universities – whether or not you call that managerialism. That is not at all to suggest that universities are merely businesses: self-evidently they have different reasons for existing and different roles to play. But the disciplines of good business management – strategic leadership, financial strength, resource management and accountability – are important in any organisation whether it be a private sector company, public sector agency, charity or anything else. As large and unusually complex entities, universities need those disciplines more than most.

As discussed in Chapter 2, universities have a mixed track record of delivering effective change. Over the years, they have effectively transformed many times but there is nevertheless a major benefit to be had from being better at delivering change. In the future, the ability to design how they respond to the changes in the world around them will increasingly become a necessary requirement for universities if they are to remain relevant and to deliver their missions. So now is the time to change the way they change.

Endnotes

1 In fact, while this idea is widely attributed to Heraclitus, there is no evidence of him expressing it in quite these terms. What is certain is that he expounded on the all-embracing presence and importance of change in the cosmos, for example: 'All entities move and nothing stays still'.

2 I declare an interest here – as just such an external advisor advising universities.

3 Throughout this paper, I have used the terms 'change initiative' and 'change project' interchangeably to describe any set of activities that are managed and governed in a way designed to achieve a specified alteration to the status quo and which have defined start and end points. For the most part I have avoided the use of the term 'change programme' because, although it is widely used in the sector, it has the potential to be confused with 'programme' meaning a course of academic study. The one exception to this is the section in Chapter 3 where I specifically discuss the difference between projects, programmes and portfolios. Additionally, I have not differentiated between 'change' and 'transformation' – as the difference is one only of scale and often the terms are used interchangeably.

4 See, for example: guidance provided by government (https://www.gov.uk/guidance/project-and-programme-management) or by the Association for Project Management (https://www.apm.org.uk/)

5 Examples outside of secure logins are Leeds (https://change.leeds.ac.uk/change-toolkits/), Greenwich (https://www.gre.ac.uk/changemanagement) and Cambridge (https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/organisational-change-guidance)

6 Address by President John F Kennedy in the Assembly Hall at the Paulskirche in Frankfurt, 25 June 1963.

7 The term 'Robbins inspired change' is used here as a shorthand for the growth in the sector in the 1960s generally associated with the Robbins Report (the report of the Committee on Higher Education, chaired by Lord Robbins) even though as Lord Willetts points out, the drive for growth actually predated Robbins' work. See David Willetts, *A University Education*, 2017, p.40.

8 For John Hood's departure see https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/oxford-v-c-to-go-but-reform-still-on-the-agenda/311206.article. For Peter Horrocks' exit see https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/open-university-v-c-peter-horrocks-announces-resignation

9 See https://exchange.nottingham.ac.uk/blog/project-transform-learning-the-lessons/

10 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, 1532.

11 Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 1963, p.20. Kerr, as well as being a hugely influential leader and thinker about higher education, was known for such pithy observations: in 1967, after being summarily sacked as President of the University of California by its highly politicised Board of Regents, he commented that 'I left the presidency of the University just as I had entered it – fired with enthusiasm.'

12 The notion that 70 per cent of change initiatives fail is widely quoted – see for example https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/leadership/changing-change-management and http://www.reply-mc.com/2010/09/19/why-70-of-changes-fail-by-rick-maurer/.

However, Mark Hughes at the University of Brighton undertook research to try to understand the source of the statistic (Mark Hughes, *Do 70 Per Cent of All Organizational Change Initiatives Really Fail?*, in *Journal of Change Management,* Volume 11, Issue 4, 2011) and rejected it as unsupported by any evidence. He suggests the figure emanates entirely from a comment in Michael Hammer and James Champey's 1993 book *Reengineering the Corporation* where they say 'our unscientific estimate is that as many as 50 per cent to 70 per cent of the organizations that undertake a reengineering effort do not achieve the dramatic results they intended.' Over the years, it seems, 'an unscientific estimate' has become 'a proven fact', 'as many as 50 per cent to 70 per cent' has become '70 per cent', 'a reengineering effort' has become 'any change initiative', and 'not achieving the dramatic results intended' has become 'outright failure'. That perhaps tells us more about the ability of unsubstantiated opinions to morph into established truth than it does about the success of change initiatives.

13 Tony Blair's views on delivery in spite of public sector strictures can be seen at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/388528.stm. Dominic Cummings, before his spectacular falling out with Boris Johnson, was making it his mission to reform the way government is carried on – as he explains in this video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GNaWPV5l4j4. And Jim Hacker was the fictional Minister for Administrative Affairs in the satirical situation comedy *Yes Minister* by Antony Jay and Jonathan Lynn (and later the prime minister in the follow-up *Yes, Prime Minister*). Hacker repeatedly finds himself stymied in his attempts to introduce reform by his loquacious permanent secretary (and later cabinet secretary), Sir Humphrey Appleby.

14 Louis V. Gerstner Jr, *Who Says Elephants Can't Dance*?, 2002.

15 Marianne Mazzucato at UCL has shown that major advances launched to the world by private sector businesses could not have happened without innovation in government and universities. See https://marianamazzucato.com/

16 Ewart Wooldridge, *Strategy, Governance and Leadership* in Stephanie Marshall (ed), *Strategic Leadership of Change in Higher Education*, 2019, p.18.

17 Adam Shore, *Learning from Failure in Higher Education Institutions*, Adam Shore, HEPI blog, 27 October 2022 https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2022/10/27/learning-from-failure-in-higher-education-institutions/

18 The full quote, from John C. Maxwell, is 'Fail early, fail often, but always fail forward'.

19 Source uncertain, though widely attributed to Shirley Williams.

20 Clark Kerr, *The Uses of the University*, 1963, p.134.

21 Source uncertain, though widely attributed to Aristotle.

22 Susan Lea, *Turning Around a University: Lessons from Personal Experience,* HEPI Debate Paper 32, 2023, p.14 https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2023/03/16/how-to-turn-around-a-university-lessons-from-personal-experience/

23 The Theory of Change is expounded by many organisations. See for example: https://www.theoryofchange.org/what-is-theory-of-change/

24 Words spoken by Mr Weston to his son Frank Churchill in Jane Austen, *Emma*, 1816, Volume 2, Chapter 5.

25 Source uncertain, though widely attributed to Gandhi.

26 Jeremy Clarkson, column in *The Sunday Times*, 28 January 2007.

27 PA Consulting, *How Universities can Improve their Approach to Transformation – Ten Priorities for Change*, 2022, p.6.

28 PA Consulting, *How Universities can Improve their Approach to Transformation – Ten Priorities for Change*, 2022, p.10.

29 One such example is Association of Project Management, *Projects, Programmes and Portfolios, so what is the Difference?*, 2018. https://www.apm.org.uk/news/projects-programmes-and-portfolios-so-what-is-the-difference/

30 Peter McPhee, *Successful leadership and Management to Achieve Major Strategic Change: Making the Melbourne Model* in Stephanie Marshall (ed), *Strategic Leadership of Change in Higher Education*, 2019.

31 Attributed to George Berbard Shaw in William H White, *The Organization Man*, 1956.

32 The term 'waterfall method' was coined by Winston W Royce (in *Managing the Development of Large Software Systems*, 1970) because the graphical presentation of plans for such projects, in which the major phases of activity are sequential, were thought to resemble the shape of a waterfall. Pedantically, it should really have been called 'cascade method' since geographers generally use the term waterfall to mean a single vertical drop whereas a cascade is a series of smaller drops along the bed of a river – more resembling a traditional project plan. But the name has stuck!

33 Many sources are available to explain agile in detail. A summary is presented at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Agile_software_development

34 Examples of universities that have adopted agile include UCL: (https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/2023/mar/ucl-wins-ucisa-digital-transformation-year) and Strathclyde: (https://www.strath.ac.uk/whystrathclyde/peoplestrategy/agileworking/benefitsofagileworking/)

35 Source uncertain by widely attributed to the American aviation pioneer and writer, Amelia Earhart (1897-1937). Earhart certainly lived her life according to the sentiment – tenaciously pursuing a series of goals including becoming the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic. In the end, however, her singlemindedness may have cost her her life – she vanished in 1937 along with her navigator Fred Noonan while seeking to become the first woman to fly round the world. The exact location and circumstances of their disappearance remain disputed to this day.

36 Attributed to Churchill though – like many aphorisms attributed to him – there is no evidence of when and where he actually said or wrote it. The first recorded use of the words was by Sir Ian Gilmour in a Cabinet meeting in 1981 – sadly, Margaret Thatcher's response to the comment is not recorded. Gilmour later wrote that he was quoting Churchill but did not provide a specific source. As there was a short overlap in their careers in public life, it is conceivable that the words were spoken by Churchill in a conversation in which Gilmour was present.

37 UCISA, *Effective Benefits Management for IT and Business Change Projects*, 2016 https://www.ucisa.ac.uk/resources/effective-benefits

38 Heather Lawrence and Nicola Cairns, *A Guide to Evidencing the Benefits of Change in Higher Education*, University of Strathclyde, 2017 https://evidencingbenefits.strath.ac.uk/Portals/7/The%20Guides/Strathclyde_Evidencing_Benefits_Guide2017.pdf?ver=2017-01-23-142633-867

39 Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline*, 1990.

40 Susan Lea, *Turning Around a University: Lessons from Personal Experience*, HEPI Debate Paper 32, 2023, p.9.

41 The change curve is based on work by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross into the five stages of grief, contained in her book *On Death and Crying*, 1969.

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