

# *Working with Social Change*

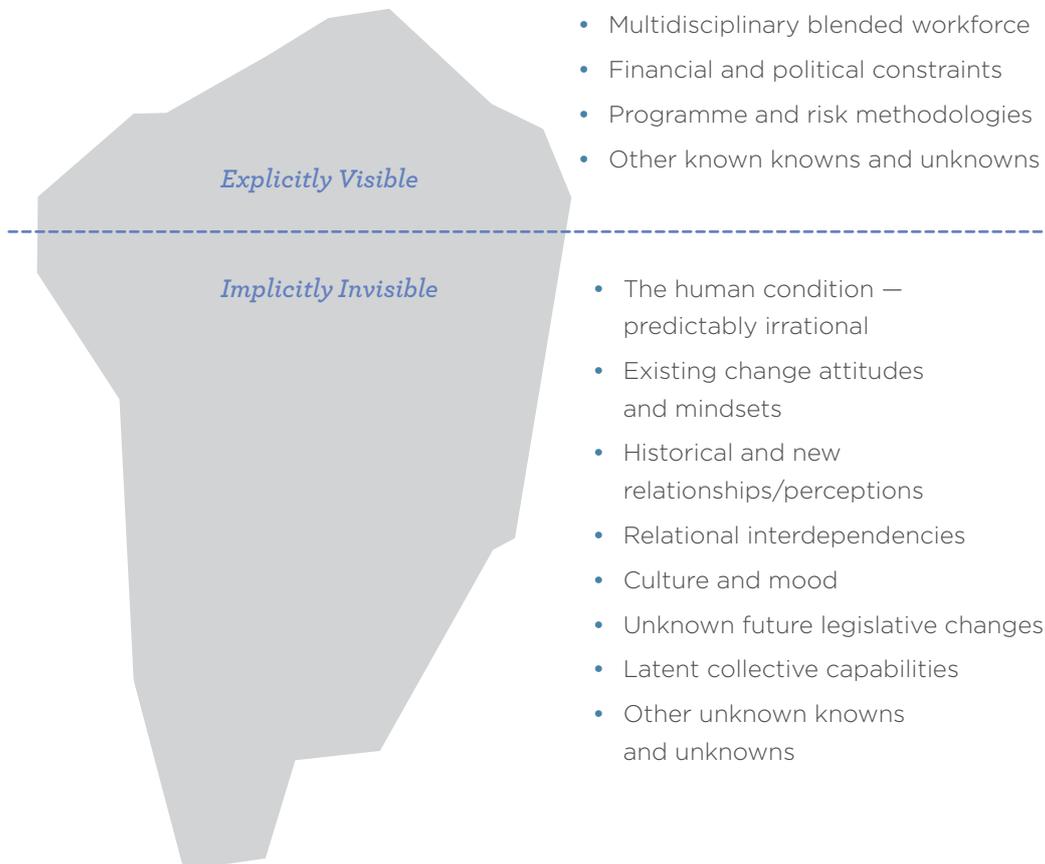
A targeted approach to understanding and investing in change  
JANUARY 2017

**BetterChange**  
Adapt. Evolve. Thrive.

## Complex and dynamic operating environments

The world we live is changing faster and faster. It is characterised, more and more, as volatile, uncertain, ambiguous and complex. This means that we are often dealing with a world where many of the critical factors are invisible. Further complexity arises from the fact that many factors — visible and invisible — are also in motion and changing over time. Little is static for long these days.

- Scope and scale of change initiatives
- Legacy systems, processes and technology
- Constraints of roles and responsibilities
- Emerging new practices and technology
- Multidisciplinary blended workforce
- Financial and political constraints
- Programme and risk methodologies
- Other known knowns and unknowns



As a measure of reality, psychologists often talk about the iceberg model. The visible explicit reality can represent less than 10%, with the below the surface implicitly invisible representing the other 90%. Often we are trying to change with visibility of only 10% of what's real — that's a big problem.

## Working with complex social systems

Successfully navigating/responding/implementing change in such a complex environment is a significant challenge for most organisations today. The long-run track record for change is littered with programme delays, cost over-runs, failure to deliver on expected benefits and high human cost. Success rates stubbornly remain at less than 30%, particularly for large-scale change. The increasing speed and complexity of organisational life makes change even more challenging.

Better ways of dealing with change in dynamic complex environments are emerging. Scaled Agile is an example of a method that seeks to improve responses to change by:

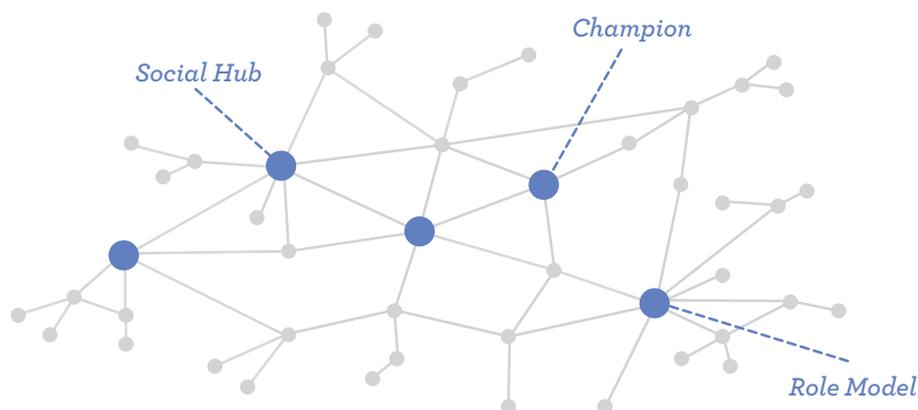
- decentralising decision making and responsibility
- breaking programmes into smaller units
- shortening feedback cycles
- delivering value in smaller increments
- unlocking the intrinsic motivation of knowledge workers.

Scaled Agile depends on and generates a different way of socialising the work – both with IT workers and business workers.

Another established approach (especially in Europe and the US) is to better understand social systems/networks. Not everyone has equal impact on generating and establishing change.

Malcolm Gladwell's book *The Tipping Point* looked at the development of social change. Gladwell found that success in any kind of social change is heavily dependent on the involvement of people with a particular and rare set of skills. These people he describes as Connectors (social hubs), Mavens (information specialists) and Salesmen (charismatic persuaders). Finding these people can be difficult without being able to look across the population and understand the network effect they exert.

Understanding this small but influential group provides greater confidence in understanding how implicit (and often social) factors impact on how the wider population thinks about change and how that translates into behaviour.



## ***A network approach to change — old wisdom, new science***

Modern organisations are increasingly being seen as networks of internal and external relationships that determine the culture and relative performance of the organisation.

Network science has now evolved to the point where it can provide effective tools to understand social networks. These tools recognise a number of common properties of social networks, including:

- social networks are dynamic and self-organising — they change and grow
- social networks can exhibit spectacularly emergent behaviour
- social networks tend to exhibit 'power-law' structure — <20% of the individuals connect to >80% of the total individuals
- the social connectivity of an individual is driven by their relative 'fitness' (attractiveness) and the number of social connections they already have
- real networks tend to form around a number of highly connected people and a hierarchy of connectivity — heavily connected people, less connected people, then lots of low connected people
- social networks underlying complex systems are both robust/resilient (to random people leaving) and vulnerable (to key people leaving)
- the resilience of social networks arises out of the principle of self-organisation rather than central planning
- six degrees (or less) of separation is a common phenomenon of very large social networks.

At Better Change, we see network analysis as a key tool for dealing with change as a more social and cultural practice because it provides a robust way of identifying those individuals who exert a disproportionate influence on the whole community and provides a doorway into deeper understanding of what's really going on.

We have a strategic alliance with Maven7 — a world leader in organisational network diagnostics and analysis. Maven7 has a range of tools including OrgMapper.

OrgMapper captures social data by using an online survey that asks everyone approximately 20 questions such as:

- Which of your colleagues are most likely to speak for the needs and opinions of others?
- Who do you turn to for advice before making an important work-related decision?

Then OrgMapper applies sophisticated analysis to map the network and expose the relevant features of that network, for example, identifying the relative quality of network cohesion (trust) and finding the cohort of key influencers.

Finally, the facilitation of a series of focus groups draws out a deeper collective understanding of the relevant implicit factors such as changing mindsets, cultural beliefs, assumptions, deeper realities and so on.

Successfully taking a network approach to change requires clarity of objectives. Projects need to be focused on a specific opportunity or risk that needs to be resolved. There needs to be an obvious reason and benefit for taking the approach that makes sense to the population, which can be communicated prior to the survey and will increase the likelihood that participation rates are sufficient.

Examples of possible objectives could include:

- accelerating the development of a more nimble and cohesive workforce
- improving the speed and effectiveness of formal/informal communication in support of strategic objectives
- improving the effectiveness of leaders at all levels
- accelerating the speed of specific change, for example, customer centricity, culture change, mergers/acquisitions, etc.

## ***What a project would look like***

### ***Design***

Project design including the purpose, scope/scale, survey questions, communications, data requirements, roles/responsibilities **Week 1**

### ***Launch***

Launch of the project including communications of project timeframes, outputs, ethical expectations. **Weeks 2-3**

### ***Data collection/analysis***

Online survey completed by the population followed by OrgMapper network analysis. **Weeks 4-6**

### ***Network insights***

Presentation and discussion of network analysis findings. **Week 7**

### ***Change focus groups***

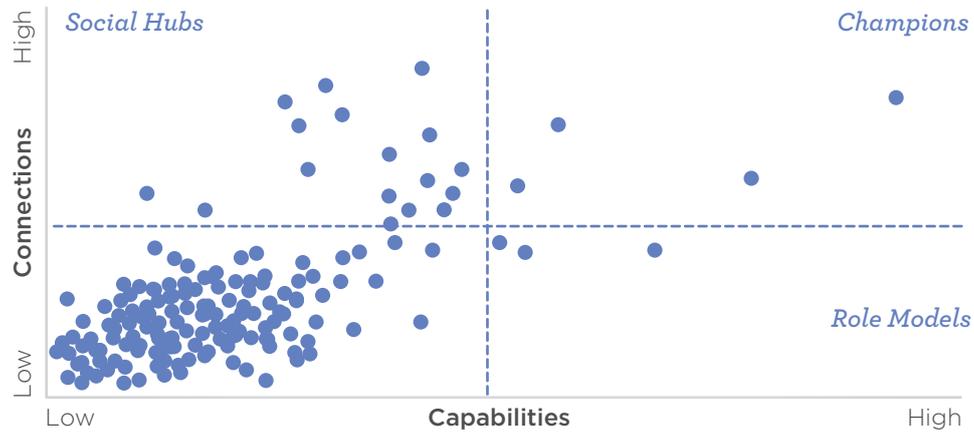
Design and delivery of facilitated session(s) with key influencer population. **Weeks 8-10**

### ***Final report***

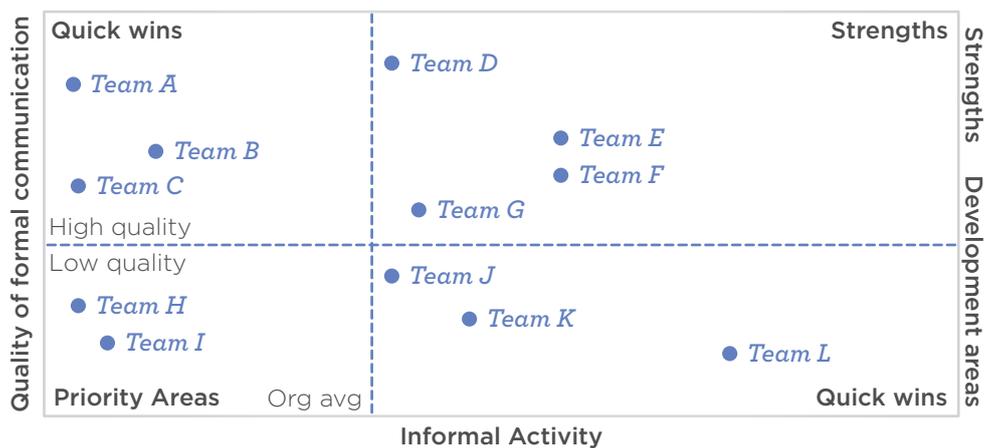
Presentation and discussion of the final report. **Week 11**

## Project outputs – network insights

There are a number of insights that are generated by analysis of the social network.



- Identification of the structure of the social network that drives culture and performance across the organisation.
- Identification of key influencers:
  - Role models
  - Change champions
  - Social hubs
  - Likely to be 5% of the group.
- Assessment and benchmarking the effectiveness of current communication (formal and informal):
  - Strengths
  - Priority development areas
  - Quick wins.
- Visualisation of trust/communication flows across the organisation – and suggestions for improvement.
- Identification of a cohort of key influencers that can be developed as responsible agents of change across the organisation.
- Understand the levels of integration/dependance on contractor/contingent workforce.



## ***Project outputs – social insights***

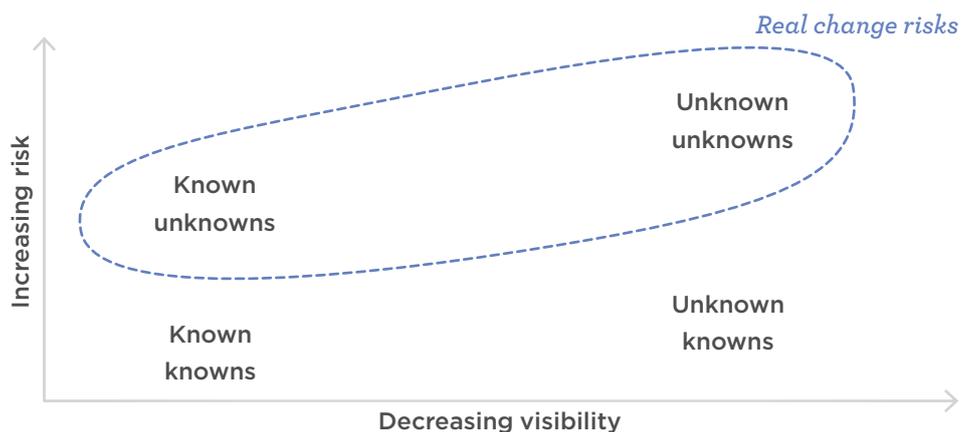
There are a number of insights that are generated by connecting and exploring a deeper and more holistic understanding of current/emergent reality – what are the real underlying conditions that impact change? – including a deeper collective understanding of:

- adaptive capability/capacity of the organisation
- current mindset – beliefs and assumptions
- current perceptions regarding change
- conflicting commitments that dilute change intentions
- critical criteria and priorities that will support relevant change
- unspoken and uncomfortable truths
- emotional motivators/drivers that shape how the group sees and responds to change.

Leading to the identification of:

- potential opportunities to improve learning, make change more effortless and increase speed to value
- potential risks of generating resistance and wasting effort
- hard decisions required to make change easier.

A key outcome for the project is to uncover unknown unknowns and illuminate known unknowns that create real risks to the making real progress towards better ways of working.



## ***Proposed target outcomes***

### ***Develop a respected change agent cohort***

Our experience has been that identified key influencers generally feel a responsibility for improving the wider system. They are motivated to develop themselves and others. Because they are disproportionately influential and connected, lifting their change capability will leverage the senior leadership's strategic change intentions through their genuine and trusted relationships.

Making the change agent cohort visible also allows senior leadership to recognise the respect with which they are held.

### ***Accelerate real change in the workforce***

Connecting with the key influencer group enables faster understanding and adoption of new thinking and practices by the wider population. Meaning is generated out of the genuine relationships that shape how individuals see and react to change. Concerns and resistance can be shared and resolved at source in real time rather than waiting for them to percolate up to senior leadership.

### ***Greater value for money***

One of the key constraints for many organisations is financial. Responsible financial management is a key survival priority for organisations dealing with a changing world. When we understand the social network — where not everyone has equal impact — we can target our change design and investment on the people that matter more. Without understanding the social network, it is easy to overinvest in many people and initiatives, while under-investing in the few that matter.

### ***Improve and align communication***

Most formal organisational communication suffers from time delays and can be distorted by personal agendas. Hearing from the key influencer group helps flush out hidden issues and get beneath the surface to make leadership communication more relevant and authentic.

By connecting the cohort of key influencers with itself and with senior leadership, communication can be more responsive to immediate and emerging conditions, and by plugging in to an information source that comes straight from a trusted and influential group, leaders can improve understanding of their communication and align formal and informal ('over the water cooler') communication.

### ***More impactful leadership***

The effectiveness of leaders' decisions and actions is dependent on the quality of their situational awareness. By enhancing access to trusted insights from all levels of the organisation, leaders are better informed about what really matters and can therefore respond more intelligently — to design, target and time changes more skillfully and decide what they can safely ignore or let go.

## Partners

### Better Change

Better Change is a leading practitioner of contemporary approaches to positive change. Beyond the limitations of traditional change management practice, we strongly focus on the socio-cultural aspects of organisational relationships. We use trust, communication, generative change mindsets, facilitation and analysis of social systems to accelerate the speed to real change and new value. Maven7 is our strategic partner for network analysis.

### Maven7

Maven7 is a world leader in social and network analysis. Maven7 is strongly science-based, and its two academic founders are leaders in the rapidly developing field of network analysis. The network algorithms they have developed have twice been published in *Nature*, the world's most cited inter-disciplinary scientific journal. Founder Albert-László Barabási is the renowned author of *Linked – How Everything is Connected to Everything Else and What it Means for Business, Science, and Everyday Life*.

Maven7 has delivered over 300 network analysis projects, including using social network analysis for:

- Strategic planning
- Change management
- Leadership development
- Employee engagement
- Internal communications

The Maven7 tools are proven across social systems of a few hundred people to over 10,000.

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