

A close-up photograph of a spider on its web, with a bright yellow arrow pointing from the right towards the text. The background is a blurred green, suggesting foliage.

# Architects of success

Choosing a change leadership team



“Many programmes fail because the change manager lacks the right experience, seniority and interpersonal skills. An effective leadership team should have a change architect: someone who is aware of both the strategic vision and the practical steps necessary to get there. He or she understands exactly how change impacts people and is able to influence employees and top management alike, to overcome resistance and avoid costly delays. Above all, a change architect keeps a constant focus on the planned benefits of the programme, and is not afraid to step in whenever these are threatened.”

**Fiona Sheridan, Partner, Ernst & Young**

## Choosing your change leadership team may be one of the most important decisions you'll ever make.

The failure experienced by many large scale change initiatives is all too familiar. Productivity falls due to low morale and absenteeism; staff leave due to lack of career opportunities; delays creep in as unions fight proposed job cuts; and planned efficiency gains falter as employees struggle to master new technology. The real tragedy is that while such problems are well known, they continue to be repeated again and again.

The importance of the human factor in major change programmes was brought home when a large financial services company announced a major restructuring. After a hi-tech, upbeat presentation to staff, the floor was opened to the audience, with the executive team primed to discuss issues such as strategy, marketing and organisational design. The panel was therefore rather surprised when a lone hand went up, followed by the question: "Does this mean I won't have my own desk anymore?"

Such a simple and unexpected reaction demonstrates the difficulty in translating a broad corporate vision into action. For organisational leaders, the intellectual argument for change is highly rational and compelling, whether it's to reduce costs, increase productivity or move to a new operating model. Those impacted by the change, on the other hand, are naturally more concerned with how their daily working lives may be affected - and whether they'll still be in a job in six months' time.

In the rush to deliver a programme on time, 'change management' can become an afterthought, consisting of a hastily conceived communications plan that fails to excite employees. This problem is all too familiar to many organisations, yet seems to get repeated in each new programme. How can senior management stop this negative cycle of events?

**Change architecture** is the bringing together of skills, knowledge, experience, tools, resources and plans to design and deliver manageable and sustainable change to minimise benefit leakage.

## Finding the right person to influence change

All too often, leaders selected to oversee change do not have the most effective combination of attributes. When it comes to leading change, programme directors may be very process-oriented, financially-focused or results driven, but place a lower value on understanding how people are affected by change and how this in turn impacts benefits. Consequently they often struggle to grasp the complex personal and political issues at stake.

Probably the greatest weakness lies in the skill-set and experience of the typical change manager. Without the gravitas and authority of a respected senior position, it can be very tough to influence people at all levels in the organisation and persuade them to accept new approaches or alter direction. Having relatively little experience in pushing through major change, he or she may not have the intuitive judgment to spot the early warning signs of a poorly designed programme and to identify problems as they are. To counter such issues successful organisations are now including a change architect in their change leadership team.

When selecting a change architect, organisations should look for senior, high calibre candidates that have worked on successful, large programmes in the past.

He or she should have a strategic and commercial outlook and be comfortable working alongside the executive team. Another essential quality is a good insight into human psychology, in order to understand the concerns of staff. One particularly effective change architect was referred to as 'part coach, part therapist, part pragmatist.' Many companies also find that an external individual can provide greater independence and objectivity.

No two programmes are alike, so a successful change architect should be flexible and not rooted in fixed methodologies. He or she should instinctively know when to intervene and have the courage to step in and challenge both junior staff and top management - and the resilience to keep pushing when it's important.

Given the scale of change in many organisations, and the high cost of failure, the change team members supporting the architect should ideally be selected from the brightest and the best of upcoming managers. It's likely that these people would also need additional training to help them fulfil their roles.

## A change architect designs and oversees successful change

### Traditional change manager

- ▶ Works with staff to provide tactical support on issues such as communications and training
- ▶ Gets involved mid-programme
- ▶ Helps employees adapt to changes

### Change architect

- ▶ Works with leadership, takes a strategic view of change that considers the impact on people
- ▶ Helps leaders to shape both the content and style of the change programme
- ▶ Gets involved at the start
- ▶ Focuses on benefits and helps leaders to take tough decisions

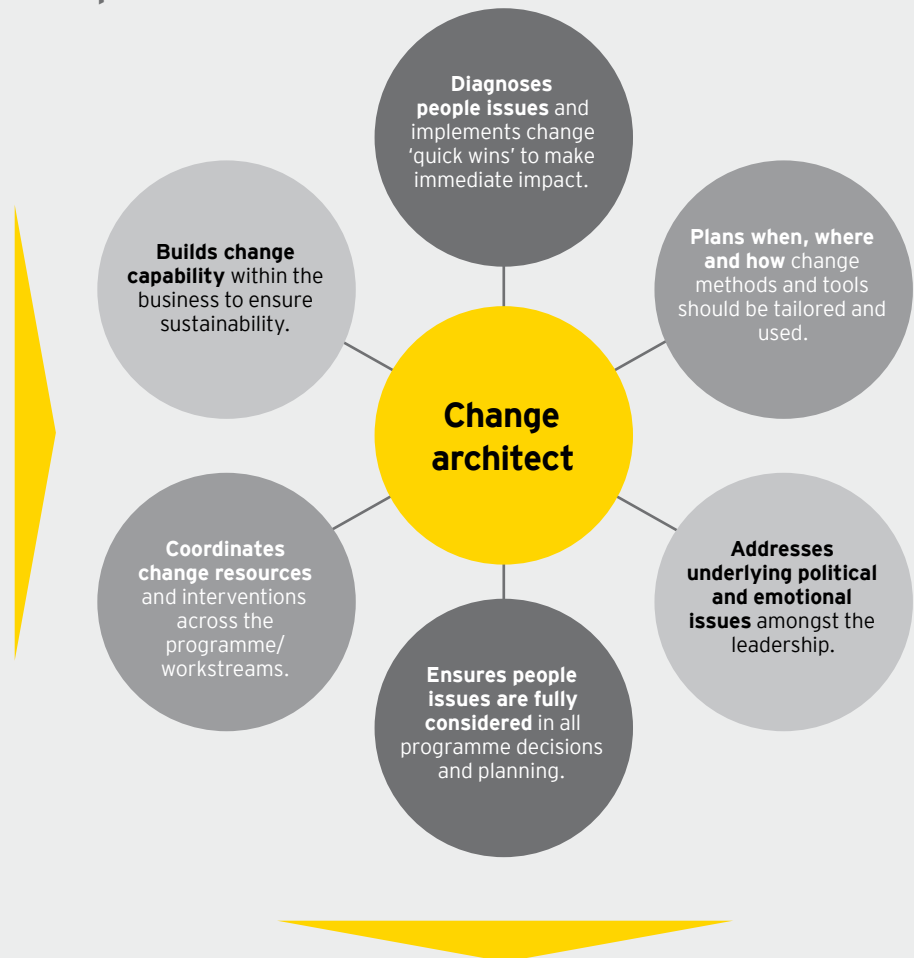
## A successful change architect requires a rounded set of skills

### The role

#### A change architect:

- ▶ Builds credibility quickly as they have 'been there and done it'
- ▶ Understands when to use bespoke tools and change methods within a programme
- ▶ Has the people skills to be able to address sensitive political and emotional issues with senior leadership
- ▶ Can challenge leadership teams to see things from a people perspective
- ▶ Gets involved at the start

### The person



#### Benefits

- ▶ Minimises benefits leakage
- ▶ A strong people focused solution
- ▶ Change that is sustainable

“Leaders’ strategies are rooted in reason and rationality, but they don’t always take account of the political and emotional concerns of employees. The case for change has to be meaningful at a very personal level.”

Lucy Hirst, Ernst & Young

## Transforming a vision into practical reality

A change programme is like a long pipeline of activities; if not managed carefully, the planned benefits can leak out at various points in the cycle. The change architect’s role is to identify where such leaks can occur and build in safeguards, as well as make rapid interventions when delays or other problems occur. Using experience gained from numerous successful change initiatives, he or she maintains a driven focus on the desired benefits, by rigorously tracking and measuring the outcomes.

A change architect helps transform a vision into a practical reality - in the same way that a traditional architect takes a client’s ideas and sees these through to a finished building. Working alongside the business and programme leaders, this individual has a broad, strategic role that touches every stage of the change process from concept to implementation and beyond. He or she may have to navigate a path through organisational politics, in line with the values and behaviours and find ways to give staff the skills to survive in their new environment.

It’s important to understand the underlying case for change and the potential barriers to success, as well as being aware of how effectively the organisation has dealt with change in the past, to avoid repeating bad habits. One company with a history of over-staffing was looking to create a shared service centre off shore. With the help of a change architect, it managed to determine almost half of its headcount could be transferred to the new location – with significant cost saving.

Given many people’s natural aversion to change, the change architect will have to advise on managing important stakeholders such as trades unions, to gain buy-in on potentially controversial initiatives.

Another key task is to support the technical design teams, helping them get greater input from employees on the front line in order to come up with more practical and workable solutions. Such a consultative approach demands considerable resolve and patience from leaders, who may feel that discussing plans with employees is unnecessarily time-consuming, and could actually generate too much resistance to the changes. Part of the change architect’s task is to help senior management determine when to be flexible and when to stick to the original course.

He or she understands that simply delivering a new system or structure does not in itself define success. A change architect also knows that it’s all too easy to fall back into bad old ways, so will help organisations to sustain positive results.

The case of one large multinational client demonstrates how easy it is to lose sight of key objectives. Having bought a much smaller business, senior management wanted to integrate the new acquisition into the existing structures and processes. The change architect argued that this would destroy the entrepreneurial culture that made the company such an attractive target in the first place, thus jeopardising future value. Eventually a suitable compromise was reached, enabling the new subsidiary to maintain a high degree of freedom within its new corporate environment.

## Carrot or stick?

By showing a willingness to discuss issues at length, and if necessary make changes to the programme, staff can recognise that there is a genuine two-way dialogue. Sometimes a very small degree of flexibility is all that's needed to keep people happy and productive, such as when a UK health trust agreed to change its new working hours to help a community nurse collect her children from school.

Those leading change should be honest and open, in order to gain credibility and address thorny issues such as job losses, relocation and retraining. It's equally important to stress the positive aspects of change. An experienced change architect would work with senior management to structure interesting roles and improved career prospects, which can improve productivity and reduce attrition rates.

Although leaders should show a willingness to listen and respond on matters of implementation, they should however also make it clear that the overall strategy is not up for discussion. Again, the change architect can play a supportive role, helping managers keep a tight focus on the ultimate objectives, and ensuring that they don't waver in the face of resistance.

However, communication alone will not be sufficient. If an organisation is serious about transforming its culture and altering the way people work, it will have to set a clear direction in the form of targets and standards that are built into job descriptions and rewards. Broadcasting the successes of those embodying the new behaviours can provide positive publicity and help in changing values.

One client working in the energy sector found that despite extensive training, a sales person was still focusing on the traditional way of doing business, so her manager took the tough but necessary step of dismissing her. This sent a message that the company was serious about change.

“An organisation has to carefully define what it means by success. It's not just about delivering a shiny piece of hardware or meeting a deadline. It's more about realising planned efficiencies or cost savings.”

Penny Stocks, Partner,  
Ernst & Young

“What makes a good change architect? Experience with successful large-scale programmes and a focus on results. You should be able to hold your own with senior management and know when to be flexible and when to stay firm.”

Peter Leadbetter, Ernst & Young

### The missing link

Change can be hugely unsettling and it's natural to expect resistance. By identifying how and where people are affected, it's possible to overcome obstacles without compromising the overall strategy. Acting as the programme's 'conscience,' a change architect helps leaders put their vision into practice, advising when to be flexible and when to stand firm, all the time keeping one eye firmly on the main prize.

Given the cost of many change programmes, the pressure to show tangible results is understandable. By taking a wider strategic view, a change architect can help focus minds on delivering real benefits rather than simply meeting deadlines. Ultimately it's people that make the difference, and organisations that put staff at the heart of change stand a greater chance of meeting their goals.

None of this can be achieved without the right person on the leadership team. Someone whose judgement is enhanced through extensive past experience. Someone with a natural authority backed up by real seniority. Someone who combines drive and a focus on results with strong behavioural skills. Finding such a trusted individual is no easy task, but he or she just could be the missing link between failure and success.

International




## Five early warning signs that a change programme is in trouble

1. The change manager has limited experience of major change
2. The focus is on technology and processes, with little mention of people
3. There is an emphasis upon 'results' as opposed to 'benefits'
4. The organisation has not defined 'what it means by success'
5. An experienced change architect is not part of the leadership team







**For further help and advice on People and Organisational Change, contact:**

**Penny Stocks**  
Lead Partner  
pstocks@uk.ey.com

**Fiona Sheridan**  
Partner  
fsheridan@uk.ey.com

**Peter Leadbetter**  
Director  
pleadbetter@uk.ey.com

**Phil Birkin**  
Senior Manager  
pbirkin@uk.ey.com

**Lucy Hirst**  
Senior Manager  
lhirst@uk.ey.com

**David Potter**  
Senior Manager  
dpotter@uk.ey.com

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Ernst & Young LLP, 1 More London Place, London, SE1 2AF.

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