

# SUCCESSFUL CHANGE MANAGEMENT WITH NLP



by John Seymour (with Martin Shervington)

## Where does NLP fit in?

The weakest link is usually in the soft skills area. This is where NLP comes in as this is what it does best.

With this in mind, below is a model that I regularly use when I am consulting on change projects to know how to intervene effectively.

This is based on Ken Wilber's 4 Quadrant model which is increasingly being used in the business world.

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His books include the best selling 'Introducing NLP' and 'Training with NLP'. He has also written 'Peak Performance through NLP' with Martin Shervington who works with John at John Seymour Associates.

## Has your cheese been moved recently?

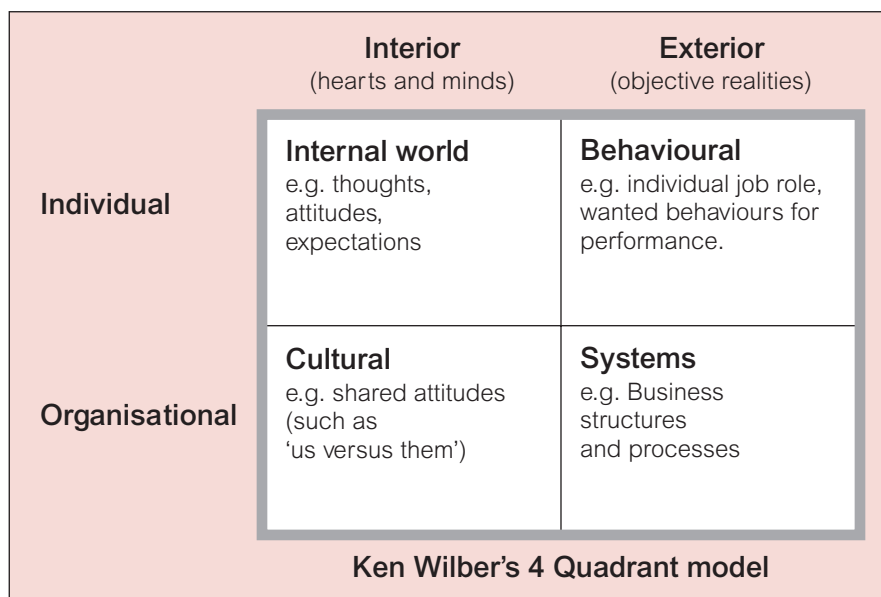
As the rate of change continues to increase we have an almost visible natural selection taking place in favour of those individuals and organisations that can learn to manage change proactively.

Clearly, the future belongs to those organisations that excel at developing the optimal culture for managing change. [The figures below are from recent research showing how many businesses are involved in what kind of change:]

- no change - 1%
- sporadic, incremental change - 24%
- continuous, overlapping change - 75%

\*as quoted in 'Managing at the Speed of Change' by Daryl Conner.

In my experience, and in relation to change, organisations will often do one thing very well (but everything else less well) and, unfortunately they will only do as well overall as the weakest link in their change management program.



Usually businesses are clear about their strategy for optimising on changes in the market place (system). Sometimes they are clear about the 'want to see behaviours' and 'don't want to see behaviours' (behavioural). Where they most often come adrift is on implementing changes. The keys to this are the left hand quadrants (internal world and cultural). This is where hearts and minds live.

Unless all the senior management are naturally gifted leaders they tend to damage the resilience of their own cultures and unconsciously produce the equal and opposite effect to the one they intended. In my experience this is where a skilled NLP consultant and process facilitator make a huge difference to success.

NLP is about getting inside people's minds. When dealing with change management, most people fear change as it represents the unknown.

It is essential to listen to the pain signals in the organisation and give another perspective (reframe them) and offer the skills

needed to turn the problems back into opportunities. It is, of course, a lot more complicated than this as you are modelling and intervening in the whole dynamic system. Each stakeholder will have a different viewpoint and you are responsible for translating between them and finding leverage points for successful intervention. This is turning NLP into action at the organisational level.

## An NLP consulting approach.

Here are the main stages that I have found essential in designing tailored programs for effective change management. (Assuming you have good enough relationship and clear enough communication between the external consultant and the commissioning manager.)

- 1 Check that senior management are very clear about their business's strategic priorities and how the project will help them achieve success.
- 2 Check they are clear about the behaviours they want more of and less of in order to implement their strategy.
- 3 Gather information from the relevant stakeholders (typically this is senior management and key influencers).
- 4 Once you understand the issues the stakeholders are facing operationally, you design training to provide the skills needed to deliver the new level of performance. Understanding how issues are perceived also tells you how to write the training program so as to maximise their involvement, ownership and motivation.
- 5 Training is delivered with the aim of dealing with substantive issues, this usually involves the relationship between 'hearts and minds' and changes in 'behaviour and systems'. In this, 'perception' is everything, because the 'hearts and minds' aspects determines how people will perceive the changes. This perception will drive behaviour.
- 6 Usually a short follow-up training is delivered to ensure the skills 'stick' as these are non-trivial skills and require repetition before becoming habitual. In addition, coaching for the people who got caught in any issues has proved to have excellent results (as coaching does for improving performance generally).
- 7 Evaluate the effectiveness of the program using a number of different measures. These include customer ratings, management performance assessments and cultural audits. When you can demonstrate that a program has worked to implement change successfully, the company can prove that it has an effective strategy for implementing change elsewhere within the organisation.

## The skills of the naturally talented change manager.

Some people are naturals at managing change and others are not. Five main qualities emerge as being crucial.

- 1 **Positive.**  
High self-confidence and ability to see opportunity in change and complexity.
- 2 **Focused.**  
They have a clear vision of what they want to achieve.
- 3 **Flexibility.**  
Able to manage their own internal thoughts and feelings as well as their interactions with others in ways that work well.
- 4 **Organised.**  
They are able to analyse, prioritise, plan carefully and compartmentalise stress. They can also ask for help when needed.

### 5 Proactive.

They engage change actively instead of evading it.

One of the issues that comes up is whether or not people think they can change themselves. If they consider that they can, then many of the internal skills can be developed. If they don't, then those limiting beliefs need to be gently and effectively challenged. NLP is a set of skills that can be used within organisations for individuals to find ways of beneficially adapting to change and in turn, there will be a shift in culture.

Some of the NLP skills that I usually teach include: (*NLP language in brackets*)

- How to optimise emotional state coupled with how to maintain a positive belief system that 'this is worthwhile'. This prevents emotional burnout. (*Maintaining resourceful state and positive belief systems*)
- How to set outcomes aligned with organisation change outcomes. (*Well formed outcomes, information gathering questions*)
- How to shift perspectives to increase flexibility and understand other people's reality. (*Perceptual positions, Meta model*)
- How to increasingly be organised through daily structures. (*Daily learning journal, coaching, mentoring, support systems*)
- How to engage change. (*Mental rehearsal, 'what if' thinking*)

It is only as these new ways of thinking become automatic, both for the individuals and the organisational culture, that you will get the evidence that the change management program has worked. This approach to change management does take a significant investment of time and energy, but it does deliver the results in this area. When you consider that this is the area that often limits business success, it is an investment that few businesses can afford to ignore.

## What to do next?

So if you are a manager, external consultant or have a vested interest in change, then NLP can make the difference between success and failure in change management. To be fully effective, NLP needs to work in conjunction with all the other skills and approaches that make a difference. I would point out the obvious, though, that getting change management to work as a whole is not an easy task. It will take effort on all sides. You will find that you will be on a steep learning curve, but there are few skill sets out there that are as effective as NLP at tailoring a successful change management program to winning our 'hearts and minds'.

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### Further reading:

'Managing at the Speed of Change' by Daryl Conner

'A Theory of Everything' by Ken Wilber

'Peak Performance through NLP' by John Seymour and Martin Shervington

*John Seymour Associates run in-house and public courses training NLP skills. They are the longest established NLP company in the UK and specialise in tailored solutions. Visit [www.johnseymour-nlp.co.uk](http://www.johnseymour-nlp.co.uk) or call 0117 955 7827 for a brochure or more information.*