

BLACKMORE FOUR

Stronger Performance through Partnership



Why are we still talking about the difference between project and change management?

The topic of change management is well written about and well debated and there is no end of resources that will help decipher the difference between change and project management. It is not our intention to repeat what has gone before but to clarify why this topic remains important and outline where the differences can be suspended, and these two domains of expertise can work together for better outcomes.

So firstly, why are we still talking about this? Recent events have seen a surge in change activity and a need to execute critical change, at pace, with intended outcomes – that combination is rare but in some circumstances is currently essential for survival. The skills required to design and execute business change are not readily available in organisations that were not previously prepared for the scale and intensity of change now upon us, but these skills, methods and techniques are now in high demand. They are also in increasingly high supply as people gravitate towards the opportunity and challenge that comes with change of all shapes and sizes.

So, it is a current topic and relevant for many businesses to define what change management really looks like for them and where project management fits to make these efforts effective.

What is change management?

Where project management provides the disciplined structure for crafting and implementing change, change management really focuses on the adoption of change, ensuring people engage with and embrace new practices. A change managed in this context is singularly looking to ensure project outcomes are integrated into the organisation and that change lasts, using an understanding of human behaviour and the psychology of change to tackle cognitive, emotional, or behavioural barriers. This brings with it a heavy focus on stakeholders and the operating context more than the content of what is being changed and is also concerned with the skills and capabilities of those impacted by change to be able to cope and ultimately thrive. To a certain degree, whilst project managers are pre-occupied with project set-up, change managers are likely to be assessing change readiness as the pre-cursor for change strategies and tactics.

What is project management?

In brief, project management involves the application of skills, techniques, and tools to a set of activities to ensure requirements or outcomes are met. This usually involves some degree of project initiation (set-up) in the first instance – ensuring the project aims, scope and resource requirements are defined before planning starts. Project management also encompasses the planning and delivery of effort to achieve the intended outcomes. This would ordinarily be based on relevant project methodology or approach that is the specialism of the project team or the most fit for purpose. In flight, project management ensures close monitoring of progress, output, and benefits to provide clear and accurate status reporting and adjustment of plans to ensure project requirements are met.

Where do change and project management co-exist?

Whether you are managing a project or managing change – both involve the management of relationships and the ability to influence the actions and behaviours of other people – either through a planned methodology or a with analysis and interpretation of human behaviour. Projects and change do not happen unless people do something different. Similarly, both require a keen identification and mitigation of risk. In project management this usually manifests as tangible, technical complexity, process, or system related, whereas change management usually deals with the unpredictability of people and the related behavioural or conduct risk.

Another way of looking this is that project management has a greater emphasis on “transaction” or series of transactions as opposed to fundamental “transformation”. Change management relies more heavily on the power of influence through enabling leadership styles rather than the command of line authority. These associations are not mutually exclusive but helps the thinking. In certain scenarios team members that are involved in projects may perceive their activities as discrete or unconnected in a transactional way, particularly if they have a role with a narrow scope and they are providing functional support on multiple projects.

This article – [managing change through project management](#) – was written in 1983 but is still housed on the Institute of Project Management’s website and provides a comprehensive discussion of this intersection for those that prefer further detail.

Aspire2BLean and Blackmore Four offer expertise in organisational change management that is context-rich and outcome-oriented. Our companies work in partnership where our combined perspectives work to integrate people and process solutions to deliver performance, growth, agility, productivity, and effectiveness.