



## Change management: the Wild West Model

Many organisations work hard to create a high performing culture, but struggle to implement change. Leading and managing change is a complex, uncertain and messy process. In our experience, changes in organisations can't happen without a range of skills and competencies being available. These skills and competencies can be clustered into roles, and in this article we introduce a typology of change roles based around the Wild West.

### Stakeholders and change processes: the Wild West of change!

Many organisations work hard to set up a high performing culture. They devise programmes and processes, build teams, engineer reward systems, and so on. They draft vision statements, embed core values, set *horshin* and *kaizen* goals. They hope to make progress... but then the initiative doesn't get underway, it goes off course, or loses momentum, or even alienates staff and managers. What went wrong? Often the answer is that the change process was mishandled.

Leading and managing change is complex, uncertain and messy. In our experience, changes in organisations can't happen without a range of skills and competencies being available to the organisation. These skills and competencies can be clustered into roles. We often give these roles such as change agent, change architect, sponsor etc. This article identifies a different typology that we've found useful... a model based around the Wild West.

The 'Wild West' model was initially developed in an article written for =mc by a management consultant, Rennie Fritchie (1980). In this article she argued that in any change process you need people – senior managers, board members, or even external consultants – to behave like characters in the 'Wild West'. The idea is that change is like the Wild West during the 19<sup>th</sup> century westward expansion period in the USA, loaded with huge opportunities and equally huge risks in a relatively unknown and fluid situation.

From her original idea =mc directors Bernard Ross and Clare Segal have developed the model in their book *Breakthrough Thinking* (Jossey Bass, 2004) to create a list of 7 – magnificent – roles that you may need to have access to when organising a change process. Not all of these are roles can be assumed yourself – some are only suitable for outsiders. And not all are needed in every situation. Examine the list below to decide what you need.

| Character                   | Role in change  | Skills needed  |
|-----------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Pioneer</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>creates the vision for the change</li> <li>inspires others and shows the way</li> <li>is wise and experienced in trailblazing</li> </ul>                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>experienced</li> <li>trustworthy</li> <li>good communicator</li> <li>tough-skinned</li> <li>committed</li> </ul>            |
| <b>Wagon Train Leader</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>drives through the change by providing direction</li> <li>instills confidence and trust in followers</li> <li>generally chooses the path for the greater good</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>experienced</li> <li>able to motivate others</li> <li>understands people's limits</li> <li>good at risk analysis</li> </ul> |
| <b>Scout</b>                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>identifies new opportunities / threats</li> <li>figures out the next move in a change</li> <li>scans the environment for challenges</li> </ul>                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>risk-taking</li> <li>courageous</li> <li>good at analysis</li> <li>resilient</li> <li>able to work alone</li> </ul>         |
| <b>Sheriff</b>              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>lays down the rules</li> <li>stabilises change</li> <li>provides structure</li> <li>interprets the rules</li> </ul>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>good judgement</li> <li>knowledgeable of rights/wrongs</li> <li>wisdom</li> <li>conflict-resolution</li> </ul>              |
| <b>Homesteader</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>puts down roots</li> <li>develops relationships</li> <li>provides stability</li> <li>develops systems</li> <li>creates cohesion</li> </ul>                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>planning &amp; organising</li> <li>team worker and builder</li> <li>can provide nurture</li> <li>builds systems</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Medicine man / woman</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>brings magic &amp; inspiration</li> <li>comes up with big ideas / techniques</li> <li>boosts morale</li> <li>provides radical solutions</li> </ul>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>charisma</li> <li>self-confidence</li> <li>access to tools &amp; techniques</li> <li>able to inspire confidence</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Hired gun</b>            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>recommends a difficult, unpopular, decision</li> <li>may carry out that difficult decision</li> <li>is often external to the organisation (e.g. consultant)</li> </ul>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>resilient</li> <li>focussed</li> <li>able to act alone</li> <li>tough decision-maker</li> </ul>                             |

The Wild West roles idea is simply a metaphor to help cluster the skills, competencies, knowledge and qualities needed. The process of change is always more complex than this. But accepting the metaphor, we can look at the skills and competencies of each of these roles in more detail.

## Pioneer

This is the person with the vision – able to see the possibilities of moving west. The pioneer embraces risk and is determined to prove that the apparently impossible is possible. They must not only have strength of vision and intuition, but also be able to deal with hardship, difficulty and scorn. The pioneer makes it possible for others to make the journey, but he or she may not be good at bringing others on board.

Are you a pioneer-in-waiting with an as-yet desire to achieve radical change in your organisation? Or do you already have an organisational vision to challenge the status quo, but need someone else to drive it through?

## Wagon train leader

The wagon train leader organises and leads the wagon train. Every wagon train needs a formal leader, aware of the responsibility vested in them, concerned in the overall good, and confident in their ability to complete the journey to a better future. Ideally the wagon train leader is leading the people on a trail he or she knows well. You can trust a wagon train leader to lead you safely because they've done it before.

Their key qualities are essentially experience, to be committed to the safety and interest of the group, and know when to use a scout to investigate and report on potential risks. A wagon train leader will generally take the safest option. But there are several warnings about the experience: if your change process is based on an approach others have already used successfully, can you be confident that it will be successful for you? Is yours the same kind of organisation? Does the approach still work?

## Scout

The scout goes ahead and looks out for new paths, new opportunities – and watches for risks. The key qualities for the scout are to be keen on personal risk taking, to have courage, and to operate alone but not feel isolated. (Scouts are often scouting in situations that are unfamiliar to them.) Unlike the pioneer, the scout is working toward a specific goal on behalf of the wagon train leader. He or she has to be trusted, has to act in the group's interest, and has responsibility to share what he finds in a methodical and useful way. Scouts can only report back what they've found – if possible with suggested course of action – but it's up to the wagon train leader to make the decisions.

Does your change process need you to be a scout who seeks out options? Do you have the qualities to do this or do you need someone else to investigate the risks associated with your change? What risks do you need to assess?

## Sheriff

This is the person responsible for establishing the rule of law once the wagon train has arrived in its new location. The sheriff defines acceptable and unacceptable behaviour – their role is to administer “the law” with the necessary structures and systems that stabilise the new situation. The key qualities for the sheriff are wisdom in applying rules, a desire to avoid confrontation (but no fear of it if necessary), and the understanding that he or she is the law enforcer, not the law maker.

It's worth noting that when the sheriff role and the CEO/chair position are held by one person, that person often confuses his or her will with the law. When appointing a sheriff make sure it's clear who is in charge of making the rules and who is in charge of interpreting the rules and making sure things are executed properly. Do you have someone on the board or on your team who acts as sheriff? Is there someone with the mental and organisational toughness to tackle challenges from colleagues? Does this person have wisdom in terms of how to be tough and apply the rules and when to look the other way?

## Homesteader

The homesteader puts down roots in the new location, and creates social networks. They want to work on developing positive feelings and create a long-lasting infrastructure. The homesteader is a key role once a new level of performance has been reached, and is an essential role if what's needed is a fulcrum for people to work around or if you want to create enough structural stability and comfort to allow people to try for new performance goals.

Key qualities for a homesteader are a desire for stability, skill in organising and shaping people's energies, willingness to play by the new rules and an awareness of how people feel and how to make them feel better. The homesteader is a real team player. They are often from an HR or personnel background, and are good at managing the people side of systems. Do you know who in your organisation can act as homesteaders? Are they able to identify the key foundations that need to be laid down?

## Medicine man / woman

This is the person who is called on to provide a bit of magic when things are going wrong. He or she may be a consultant, a new board member with great fundraising contacts, or a charismatic CEO. Whoever this person is, he or she has a secret weapon: a big idea or a new technique, and it is this that will produce results.

Key qualities for the medicine man/woman are charisma and self-confidence, a "magic bullet," an orientation toward a practical outcome, and the ability to inspire confidence in others. They can inspire people to produce extraordinary results. But check out their track record. Have they done this before? Is the magic really revolutionary, or is it an adaptation? How risky is it?

## Hired gun

The Clint Eastwood character who comes in to resolve a problem then disappears as quickly. The hired gun is someone engaged specifically to weed out those who don't want to – and won't – sign up to the change initiative. For this reason, the hired gun is often an external consultant, someone who can come in, identify key elements to be changed and often the people to be made redundant. They can have no friends. Their strength is their ability to do – to drive through – a difficult job.

Key qualities for the hired gun are clarity of purpose, the ability to work in isolation, and a clear analytic mind. They may come in for a short period and achieve significant changes. But before asking for the hired gun, you need to have clear answers to these questions: Are these changes really purposeful? What will be left at the end? How will everyone's morale survive?

## Summary

When you are embarking on a change, it is useful to consider what roles you need, and who will perform them. If you look at the skills required in the different roles above, you will see that different roles require different skills. And yet many non-profit organisations entrust a few individuals with multiple roles.

You might want to reflect further on your own situation or organisation. Imagine you're in a Wild West film. What does the "promised land" look like? How specific and concrete is your vision? Where is the unknown territory and what dangers are there? Who have you consulted about the accuracy of your perception?

Now consider who you need to be with you to drive through change. What roles do you need people to play? Are you clear on the skills, qualities, knowledge and competencies these people need to have? Do you have those people or can you get them from outside? You will need to deal with all these questions in order to help you take charge of change successfully.

### Further help

If you would like to know more about managing change, join us on =mc's **Leading and Managing Change** programme. This is a challenging 1-day programme that introduces a toolbox of techniques and approaches that help you get on top of your change initiative.

To find out more, visit: [www.managementcentre.co.uk/lmc](http://www.managementcentre.co.uk/lmc) or call us on **+44 (0) 20 7978 1516**.

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