



What's the future of change in 2009?

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- [Agents of Change Profile](#) – Ivan Hickmott.
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Editors Introduction

Happy New Year to everyone. I hope that 2009 will be successful and prosperous for you despite all the challenges. The editorial plan in 2009 is to have a monthly newsletter, which is short and full of practical advice and guidance. We know you don't have much spare time to read stuff and that you need material that can help you in your work. However, in the spirit of all January newsletters present and past, we have asked our MD – David Miller – to give his predictions for 2009.

What's the future of change in 2009?

When our editor asked me to write a piece about the effects of the downturn in the economy on the implementation of change in 2009 I frankly became a little scared. I remember from my student days, studying economics, JK Galbraith saying that "the only purpose of economic forecasting is to make astrology look respectable". You could certainly include any form of business forecasting in this maxim. Plus forecasting by its very nature involves generalisations about people and organisations. So please accept the following is not about your organisation but about others! Regardless of all of this I am going to have a go. The only caveat I will add in is that some of my forecasts get very confused with my wishes for 2009. But that's probably true of all attempts at futurology.

So here are four predictions for 2009.....

Prediction #1: We will all become more serious and grounded

I am really hoping that a positive outcome of 2009 will be the end of 'fad-surfing' and a return to real stuff that works. What we have seen over the years is, as some organisations became richer and more successful, so is their interest in the esoteric and the peripheral increased. This is particularly true in the people development area. In some cases whatever was new (or more often or not repackaged) was worshipped regardless of whether it worked or not. For example simple facilitation

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Change Agent

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techniques became 'powerful methodologies to transform the way you work' and writers regurgitating research 40 years old became 'leading-edge management thinkers'. In difficult economic times people tend to return to the things they know work and have proven pedigree. The best attribute of a business application or methodology, in 2009, will be that it actually works and gives real value for money.

Prediction #2: We will refocus on our people as central to business success

I think a really worrying trend of the last ten years is the 'commodisation of people'. What I mean by this is that relationships between employer and employee has become more distant, less connected. People in organisations can feel like they are disposal resources. There are many drivers for this. But it feels like there is a real conflict in organisations between programmes, which say the employee is important, such as employee engagement and talent management on the one hand and the apparent way employees are being treated by programmes such as outsourcing and 'right-sizing' on the other. The conflict between these approaches causes a real disconnect with people and drives, often deep, employee cynicism. My belief is that people want to belong and want to be part of successful organisation. When they feel like that they can make an incredible contribution. Often way beyond what we think is possible. But we need to re-engage with our people in a way that is human and not programmatic. One of the favourite buzzwords at the moment is 'authenticity' and my prediction is that organisations will make real efforts to re-connect to employees as human beings and we will see an increase in face-to-face and two-way communication. In other words communication will become more authentic. You can pack the powerpoints and emails away!

Prediction #3: Obtaining a return on your training investment will make a comeback

In his latest book "Outliers" Malcolm Gladwell talks about mastery taking at least 4000 hours of practice to achieve. Now I have no idea whether it is 3000 or 4000. But let's take Gladwell's word for it. The problem is this number contrasts badly with what is happening in some organisations. In the training arena - in these companies - everything is becoming geared to speed and participant happiness, not what will it take for someone to learn something and make a contribution to the organisation using those skills. Of course you need a good workshop for people to attend but you also need time for people to practice and strong sponsor support. Without these two pieces in place you will be lucky if participants retain much more than 25% three months after the workshop. So my prediction (given more in hope than certainty) is that we begin to refocus on learning as an investment. We will all create learning for employees that always combines a great workshop, opportunity to practice and strong sponsor support.

Prediction #4: Not as much will change as you think

Here we come full circle from the introduction. Too many people seem to have a vested interest in telling us the world is coming to an end. There is nothing like a doomsday scenario or human suffering to get our media into a frenzy. The picture of a famous business person sleeping on the streets (or in handcuffs!) with their clothes shredded to rags is one that brings a glint into the eye of most business journalists. However, I see organisations and people as remarkably resilient entities. We have built this economic system over hundreds of years and it is hard to see it changing in a major way. What I predict will happen is that much of what we do will go on. Inevitably there will be pain, cutbacks and people will lose jobs. However, my final prediction is that at the end of 2009, we will be very battered and very bruised and the carnage will be more than we want or need but our resilience

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will triumph over adversity.



David Miller
David Miller

MD of Changefirst

Agents of Change



This is the first in a new series that will feature change executives sharing their experience with you. Ivan Hickmott is one of our longest serving and valued facilitators so we decided to kick-off the series with him. Later editions will feature inputs from clients and suppliers.

Ivan Hickmott

What are the 3-5 most important pieces of advice you would give other change agents for them to be successful?

1. Agree with your sponsor early on in the change process, what the roles and responsibilities are for BOTH of you.
2. Do not underestimate the time involved to obtain agreement and set expectations with all your stakeholders.
3. Be ready and prepared for tough discussions (putting your head in the lions mouth) to give feedback and messages people may not want to hear.
4. Managing the people aspects of a major change requires disciplined planning – but any plan can unravel from the moment it is documented and agreed. Stay flexible!

What are the key issues you will be working on in 2009?

Encourage leaders to ensure they translate and effectively communicate business strategies into powerful stories, which engage front-line managers and the broader workforce.

2009 will see many organisations restructuring. So helping front-line managers to deal with the difficult process, both for themselves and their people.

The Life of Ivan Hickmott

- **Current Job:** Facilitator and Consultant
- **Status:** Married for 25 years with 3 children – Alec (23), Morag and Bryony (21) plus 2 golden retrievers – Tetley and Ralph
- **Lives:** Redbourn, Hertfordshire
- **University:** Leeds – History, Human Resource Management; Ashridge Management College – Organisational Consulting
- **First Job:** Personnel Officer, GEC Marconi (1979)
- **Favourite Business Book:** David C Korten 'When Corporations Ruled the World'
- **Favourite Business Gadget:** A blank sheet of paper, a pen to create a mind map to help me make sense of a complex issue.

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