

THE ICC ACADEMY NEWSLETTER

THE NEWSLETTER FOR GROWING GREAT COACHES

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WHITE PAPER SERIES: COACHING THROUGH ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

Hello! We hope you are doing well, and feeling more buoyant now that Spring is here, the cherry blossoms are blooming, and interest rates are on their way down.

Here at the ICC Academy in New Zealand, we've been considering some big questions about coaching in the modern world. We've been asking ourselves:

- How might coaching approaches be used to support organisations through major change and transformation?
- What are the upsides and limitations of virtual coaching and AI, compared to more traditional approaches?
- How could coaching support equity and inclusion, and how might we better support a neurodiverse client base?

We decided to answer these questions through a series of three white papers, the first of which we'd love to share with you today. In the interests of space, we'll share some of the key findings, and recommend that you read the full white paper at your leisure.

[Download the full white paper.](#)

Change is a constant

About 2500 years ago, the Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed that "There is nothing permanent except change." He was right of course, but Heraclitus may not have predicted the scale and pace of change that we experience in the modern world.

For instance, if we narrow our scope to focus on innovation and technology, the level of change from 1800 to 2024 is mind-boggling. Steam trains, electric lights, automobiles, antibiotics and birth control, computers, space travel, the internet, and now AI, have all arisen in the last 200 years or so, and all triggered significant social change. (Click [here](#) for a fascinating summary of technological change over human history).

We adopt technologies faster than we used to, and people in large cities even [walked 10% faster](#) in 2007 than they did in the early 1990s.

In New Zealand today, organisations are facing a swathe of changes and challenges – including a tough economic environment, reduced headcount in the public sector, the democratisation of AI, and the bedding in of hybrid work, post-pandemic. In this context, we asked: How might coaching approaches be used to support organisations through major change and transformation?

Our white paper drew on the insights of four New Zealand-based thought leaders, all of whom work in change, transformation, or human resources:

- Nick McKissack, Chief Executive of Human Resources New Zealand (HRNZ)
- Jane Hardy, Mentor and Consultant at East Partners
- Digby Scott, Change and Leadership Development Expert
- Jess Lawson, People Partner and Director at PeopleEX

Here's a snapshot of what we found.

Change can adversely affect our psychology and performance

Irrespective of the content of change, we tend to resist change because it is energy-intensive for our brains. As Dr David Rock, neuro-leadership expert and author of 'Your Brain at Work' [explains](#),

"If you look at it structurally, the network of the brain that is involved in noticing changes and deciding what to do – the prefrontal cortex – is one of the most energy-demanding, easily tired and easily overwhelmed parts of the brain. . . Any kind of change, even using

a different computer, makes you slow down, so we are built to automatically detect any kind of effort as a threat and any kind of energy reduction opportunity as a reward."

Change at work can affect people's financial security and their sense of identity and worth. As Digby Scott explained, the amygdala or threat centre of the brain is likely to be activated, while the prefrontal cortex runs through various scenarios, trying to figure out what might happen and how to prepare. This is understandably distracting, and can make it harder for people to feel good and perform well.

People leaders play a critical role in change

The experts we spoke to all agreed that team leaders play a vital role in leading through change. Jane Hardy explained that team leaders can help people to understand the nuts and bolts of change, which makes it less scary, whilst also helping people to identify the potential benefits of change.

But how can team leaders lead effectively, through change?

The most effective leaders are coach-like. In short – the most effective team leaders exhibit a range of coach-like behaviours: listening and sense making, asking powerful questions, uncovering core motivations, and framing options to promote autonomy and active choice.

Coach-like leaders are good listeners and sense makers

Change is unsettling. When team members are going through a period of change, they will need time to process, ask questions, and make sense of what this means for them. The best team leaders make space for this. They listen to their team members with a sense of curiosity – seeking to understand how they’re feeling, and also seeking new insight about how to roll out change more effectively. They try to avoid a defensive stance – for instance, jumping in to defend a change proposal, rather than giving people the time and space to have their say. As Jess Lawson put it, ***“People won’t always agree with the decision, or agree with the outcome. But they could still feel like they respect it, and feel they’ve been listened to.”***

Coach-like leaders ask powerful questions – they’re not heroes with all the answers

Good coaches know that powerful listening involves asking powerful questions. But, Digby Scott explains, we rub up against a traditional leadership model that says a leader should be a hero with all the answers. In his view, it’s far more powerful for leaders to show facilitative leadership – inviting others into the conversation, and creating the answers together.

In the context of change, these conversations could focus on the change itself – including where we should head as an organisation, and which changes we should make. Or they could focus on the response to change, from teams and individuals.

In the white paper we include a series of powerful questions that team leaders or coaches can ask, to open up dialogue, encourage deep reflection, and foster a collaborative approach to navigating change. [Check out page 5 of the white paper, for more on this.](#)

Coach-like leaders help frame options and promote ‘choicefulness’

Change is more challenging if we feel like it is being done to us, and we are not in control. In contrast, ***“good coaching grows agency, and helps you to be more choiceful,”*** explains Digby Scott.

In a change or transformation process, coach-like leaders help their team to frame up the options, and promote this sense of choice. Because team members won’t always be able to influence the change itself – for instance, a company’s decision to downsize – but they can have some choice over how they respond.

“If you can make choices that are meaningful and good for you, then the changes happening around you can be less of a big deal.” (Digby Scott, Change and Leadership Development Expert)

There’s much more in the [white paper](#) – including key practices for ‘change done well’, and insights about where and how external coaches can add real value, during organisational change and transformation.

We hope you find it an interesting and useful read. See you in October!

The team at ICC New Zealand