

# REIMAGINE CHANGE

ESCAPE CHANGE FATIGUE,

BUILD RESILIENCE

AND AWAKEN YOUR CREATIVE BRILLIANCE

CIARA LANCASTER



## INTRODUCTION

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# OVERLOADED, OVERWHELMED AND OVER IT

*'It's not the mountain we conquer, but ourselves.'*

– SIR EDMUND HILLARY, ONE OF THE FIRST CLIMBERS  
TO REACH THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT EVEREST IN 1953

**A**s a Change Manager at Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu in Sydney, Australia, one component of the role involved conducting change leadership interviews with both leaders and employees to gather data on the current state of play. In other words, listening to what is and isn't said about past, present and future change and business transformation initiatives. Collecting and assessing qualitative and quantitative data is a crucial component of organisational diagnostics.

With that in mind, let me tell you a story about a man named Jack. (Please note that some of the examples or case studies in this book have been anonymised, adapted or fictionalised for privacy, at the request of the subject, or for illustrative purposes.) One day, I had just sat down to conduct a change leadership interview with

Jack when the tirade began. Jack appeared angry and wanted to get straight to the crux of the matter at hand, which, in this case, was in relation to a business transformation project.

*‘What you need to convey to the leadership team and those consultants is that the last business transformation project didn’t exactly go as smoothly as we had been promised. For those of us on the receiving end of it, it felt like the Kokoda Track of the corporate world,’* he said.

(A note to international readers: For Australians, the Kokoda Track holds a special significance – this is where Australian servicemen and women fought the Japanese during World War Two. For seven months, soldiers fought in treacherous jungle conditions. What they endured was absolutely brutal; our soldiers simply could not have been prepared for the physical and emotional challenge.)

After the meeting, Jack went into overdrive. He issued details about kick-off meetings, with flashy presentations outlining the new business priorities, how the entire business was expected to ‘get on board’ and ‘buy in’ to the latest set of directives, how his team was delegated extra work and additional training on top of an already heavy workload, how office ‘quick wins’ were not communicating the reality of what was *really* taking place on the floor, and so on.

Tensions continued to build over the next few months, and people began to wonder whether the streamlining and new technology would result in the loss of their jobs and their livelihoods. Jack’s once vibrant team began to experience transformation PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder) in the forms of chronic stress,

change fatigue and burnout. Adding salt to their wounds, exiting team members were not replaced, yet company press releases and management meetings continued to focus on the organisation's record revenue year.

Mark Zuckerberg's famous mantra of 'move fast and break things' had done just that. The humans were broken, mentally fragile and disconnected. Work that once lit them up now had the opposite effect. From a business perspective, data confirmed that employee engagement had dipped to an all-time low, and this was starting to impact retention, productivity and innovation efforts.

Underneath his corporate bravado, Jack himself was feeling the three Os: overloaded, overwhelmed and over it. He wanted to provide more support to his team but felt that he was not equipped with the right change terminology, nor did he have the capacity or energy to commit to each team member while working on his own client work. Something needed to be done to better support the change and psychological suffering taking place.

Jack didn't seek out support for himself, either. The risks associated with that were too high. His boss might view him as a weak leader, his competitive co-workers couldn't be trusted as they were gunning for his job, and it was common knowledge that the human resources team was compliance-focused and typically acted on behalf of the organisation's best interest, rather than that of each individual employee.

Things were pretty frosty on the home front, too. Jack's wife was less than impressed with his non-existent work-life balance. The children desperately craved his presence and participation. Work

functions and work calls took place at all hours of the night, and the weekend was consumed by Jack catching up on work.

Jack found it hard to switch off and get a decent night's sleep. He was troubled by late-night rumination of work scenarios playing on repeat in his mind. Poor Jack kept the negative cycle looping by using the justification that he was just 'under the pump' like everyone else. It seemed like there was no end in sight – but Jack felt he had no choice but to keep pushing on.

Does this scenario sound familiar? Perhaps you have experienced or are experiencing something similar? You're not alone.

Research and data confirm that what many executive-level professionals are experiencing is part of a wider change overload and burnout epidemic. According to a *Harvard Business Review* article, which referenced a Harvard Medical School research study, '*ninety-six percent of all senior leaders have experienced some degree of burnout, and one third described their condition as extreme (severe burnout).*'

Another *Forbes* article explored the ways in which leadership burnout begets employee burnout, stating that '*workplace wellness programs have failed to improve people's health much at all.*' The article also states:

*'What leaders say and do has a disproportionate impact on the behaviours that employees feel comfortable adopting. Even with the proliferation of nap rooms, yoga classes, and mindfulness courses, if leaders don't sanction and model the use of these offerings, employees are loath to utilise them.'*

Regardless of your title or your tenure, it appears that no one is immune to the devastating physical and psychological impacts brought on by change overload and burnout.

But the dogma of 'shareholder profits above all else' is now antiquated. According to the 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer report, *'eighty-seven percent of respondents said that customers, employees and communities are more important than shareholders to a company's long-term success.'*

This indicates that the paradigm shift is coming and this demands a duty of care imperative. Are you waiting for your organisation and leadership team to address your burnout? They're not. At least, not soon enough. Fair or not, the onus is on you to take ownership and make damn sure that you are resilient, ready and resourceful to lead yourself through change.

## IT'S TIME TO REIMAGINE CHANGE

This book is intended to expose the human impact associated with continuous change in the workplace, and provide compassion and emotional optimism to liberate you – as an aspiring change leader – to shift in a more positive direction.

With change comes opportunity. The more open, adaptive and resilient you are to change, the more opportunities you will have access to. However, when the fear alarm is sounding, it makes it rather challenging to focus on future possibilities.

Ask yourself: Do you have what it takes to optimally cope and

thrive in the future workplace, or are all the signs pointing towards you being ill-equipped?

- How will you respond to exponential change in your personal and professional life?
- What strategies will you adopt to better support yourself as well as those people around you?
- Is your current contribution at work congruent with your potential?

The ultimate aim of *Reimagine Change* is to support you to change how you regenerate and then reapproach the incremental waves of change coming your way. And if you are not feeling any incremental workplace pressure, then that in itself presents a new set of issues that we will explore in future chapters.

By the end of *Reimagine Change*, you will have discovered:

- That complaining about your work circumstances does you zero favours
- How to remove assumptions, fears and insecurities that are holding you back
- How to anticipate, evolve and better contribute to change
- The key change identities that will influence your success
- The intrapersonal skills required for energy and intentional change
- How to balance your executive and emotional brain
- How to reframe and better respond to change
- How to forget about endgames and focus on process and progress



Unfortunately, the corporate world can be very polarising. Either you end up with an overinflated ego and a deep sense of disconnection, or you limit your potential by not playing the game and fitting a preconceived mould of who you need to be to get ahead.

Do not allow past negative experiences of workplace change to deter you on your path to potential. Do not let assumptions, fears or insecurities hold you back. And do not suffer in silence; there are outlets of support, one of which is this book.

I have written this book as a support system, or toolkit, for you to draw upon and mould to suit your own needs and desires. My hope is that you will use these insights to launch yourself towards progress and potential fulfilment.

So, on that note, allow me to introduce myself properly – and explain why I wrote this book, the content it contains and why I think it's so valuable.

## TAKE IT FROM SOMEONE WHO'S BEEN THERE

My name is Ciara Lancaster.

I believe that the world can be an incredibly different place when you return home from work with a positively charged mind and heart. The key to achieving this in the current, complex environment is change capability.

Change capability is about enhancing your humanness and your

contribution to better yourself and the organisations that you devote so much time to. In order to successfully evolve and thrive in the workplace, you need to upgrade your individual change capability at a speed equal to or greater than the expected pace of technology upskilling. Genuinely *being with* and *being for* people is at the core of human belonging and connection. You need to understand what this means within yourself before you can expand the energy outward to others.

Leaders at all levels are now expected to assume the role of change advocate. Even if you don't necessarily have the word 'change' in your job title, do you find that issues like change fatigue, resistance and mental health pressures are negatively impacting employee engagement, culture and retention? If the answer is yes, then *Reimagine Change* will act as your go-to guide to transition you from sub-optimal, corporate co-dependency to a self-directed coaching model grounded in the regeneration, recoding and reimagining of your psychological capital.

Fred Luthans, organisational behaviour expert and author of *Psychological Capital*, explores psychological capital as a state that unlocks performance, uncovers potential and encourages positive leadership interactivity. Luthans' research found that a person's performance is determined not only by intellectual capital and social capital but also their psychological capital, which is based on the four 'open to development' elements of hope, self-efficacy, resilience and optimism.

Having held senior leadership roles in organisational change management, sales and strategy, I've witnessed firsthand the need for such a transition – and the enormous difference it can make not

only on an individual level but on an organisational level, too. In addition to Deloitte, I've worked for News Corp, Bauer Media and Southern Cross Austereo.

After spending nearly twenty years in the corporate world, I created *Reimagine Change* to bridge the gap between organisational and personal transformation, focusing specifically on transition from change overload and burnout to designing a new way to *Reimagine Change*.

In among all that, I've also experienced burnout myself. There was a two-year period of my life where I experienced what I call 'peak stretch'. Peak stretch activities for me included:

- Leaping into a new industry
- Starting a new career
- Designing company-first initiatives
- Gaining new academic qualifications
- Broadening my family commitments
- Moving house twice during this time

Yes, all this, while being a mum to two boys under the age of five. This is very common in Sydney and other cities around the world, so by no means am I any different to the majority of hardworking women out there right now. And to combat all this newness, my demise was relying on old coping strategies and being oblivious to the level of control my subconscious mind – the part of the mind that influences unconscious decision making – has on behaviours and outcomes. Since then, I have replaced peak stretch with optimal growth, and the difference has been incredible. But let's keep it real. I'll be the first to admit that I am not infallible. I still have

not so great days like everyone else. However, the process with which I move through them is far more fluid.

I'm a big believer that some people talk, some people walk and some people create value offerings for other human beings. Our common humanity and duty of care to one another are the foundations of this work. If you're looking to *Reimagine Change* in business and beyond, I believe I can help you. In addition to working in the corporate world and experiencing burnout myself, here are four more reasons why our paths may align:

### 1. I VALUE 'JUST LIKE ME' ROLE MODELS

As you now know, I've been on the same corporate Kokoda Track you are probably suffering along right now. And each time, I have either succeeded and levelled up or I have failed and learned. Something I believe you can achieve, too.

### 2. I VALUE FAMILY

I'm committed to playing an active, nurturing role for my partner and two sons. Parenting is by far the greatest coaching-in-action experience. Nothing lights me up more than seeing my children be curious and creative.

### 3. I VALUE MASTERY

I've worked alongside the best of the best, most recently as a former Change Manager with Deloitte, all the while continuously upskilling at Sydney University, the University of New South Wales, the Stanford Centre for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education, and The Mind Academy.

#### 4. I VALUE HUMAN POTENTIAL

Like so many others, I have been exposed to toxic bosses that encourage you to shrink and play it small. It is disempowering and unjustified. I want to empower you to flip the script, exploring the possibilities and potential not only for yourself but for others, too.

### INTRODUCING THE REIMAGINE CHANGE MODEL

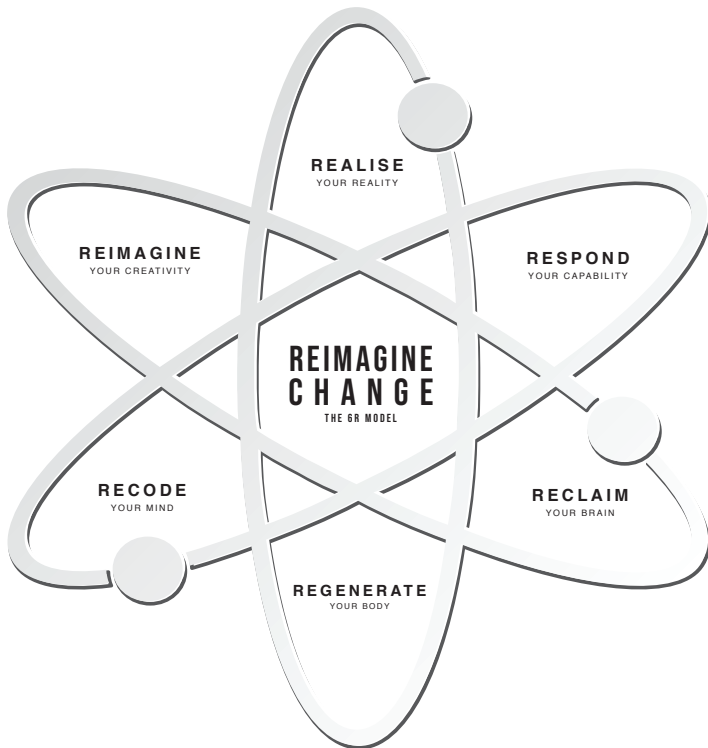


Figure 1: The 6R model to Reimagine Change.

In *Reimagine Change*, you'll discover a framework for addressing, understanding and overcoming change overload and burnout. This model provides insights and methods to help you support yourself via intrapersonal upskilling. This is the information that they don't teach at business school, that is not detailed in traditional leadership curriculums. This is where you benefit from being guided by someone with hands-on life and corporate experience in this area.

The 6R model to *Reimagine Change* consists of the following:

1. REALISE your reality
2. RESPOND via your capability
3. RECLAIM your brain
4. REGENERATE your body
5. RECODE your mind
6. REIMAGINE your creativity

The model may look nice and neat, but don't be fooled by the promise of quick fixes. You will need to invest the necessary time, effort and focus to yield any type of results. While each dimension can be tackled separately, I recommend that the sequencing is adhered to, to de-risk the 'snapback effect' or a return to change overload and burnout. By conquering the six dimensions in the order they appear, you will increase your prosilience (how you intentionally prepare to deal with challenges); resilience (how you bounce back from adversity); and adaptiveness (how you pivot for greater effectiveness) for future change success.

We'll look at each dimension in much more detail in the chapters that follow. The book is divided into two parts, with the first three Rs in Part 1 and the remaining three in Part 2. For now, here's a brief outline, so you know what to expect at each stage:

**REALISE** signals the rapid descent into the depths of change overload and burnout. This is the realisation of what is taking place, why it is taking place, and the negative impact for organisations and, more importantly, human beings. The key question to consider is: What is this teaching me?

**RESPOND** signals the shift to being curious about showing up differently and planning to take action. This is about responding to the opportunity at hand by acknowledging sub-optimal functioning and being accountable for rebuilding a future-focused change identity. The key question to consider is: What would future me ask current me to start now?

**RECLAIM** signals the shift from hyper-alert, survival brain to a calmer, self-regulated brain. This is about befriending your brain and recognising that knowledge about brain behaviour provides a powerful foundation. The key question to consider is: What brain enrichment strategy do I need to adopt?

**REGENERATE** signals the need for respite. To regenerate means to acknowledge that the human body and mind are not machines and that, for people over profits to become a reality, an initial period of in-depth recovery is essential. The key question to consider is: What environmental, human or psychological influences are no longer serving me?

**RECODE** signals the desire to accelerate your change capability. You've come this far, but are you willing to go the extra mile? Recoding requires you to break through to the subconscious mind and install new, change-capable mindsets for success. The key question to consider is: What belief systems are limiting my personal change acceleration?

**REIMAGINE** signals the return of emotional presence and energy. You will need to decide how best to channel this into creative endeavours that count. The key question to consider is: What creative value will I draw on to contribute to my work, my community and my life?

The sequencing of the six-part framework is designed to reflect how individuals spiral ‘up and out’ with regard to change overload and burnout. In a world of busyness, brain fog and cognitive overload, you may be inclined to default to shortcuts, tips and tricks, and quick wins. However, these rarely support long-term human sustainability and potential fulfilment. Instead, they keep you hooked on bad habits, negative beliefs and co-dependent programming that no longer serves you. It’s time to evolve.

*Reimagine Change* is based upon a multi-disciplinary approach, underpinned by academic research, thought leadership, and first-hand change leadership and personal transformation experiences. Figure 2 (opposite) provides an overview of what this entails.

As you can see, the multi-disciplinary approach to *Reimagine Change* consists of:

1. Change psychology
2. Neuroscientific insights
3. Neuro-linguistic programming
4. Burnout regeneration
5. Compassion cultivation
6. Change management



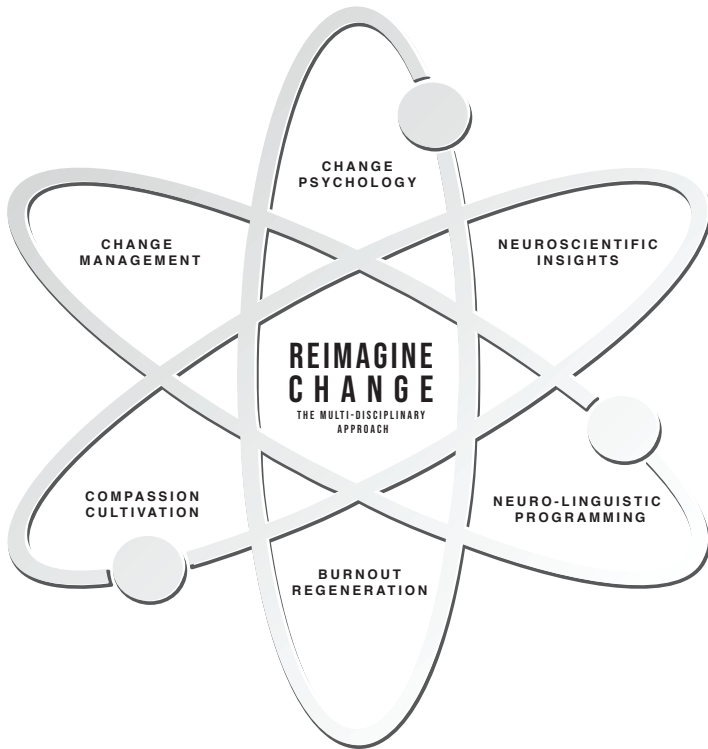


Figure 2: The multi-disciplinary approach to Reimagine Change.

My goal is to provide you with the necessary support if you find yourself under siege from change overload and burnout. This book has been designed to provide you with actionable mindset insights, emotional resilience and the change capability to thrive in the future.

## I BELIEVE IN YOU

Throughout the book, I will share personal stories that have shaped who I am today. Through this role-modelling practice, my hope

is that you, too, will be courageous enough to share more of your stories with team members and loved ones as a way to connect and build collective resilience.

Humans are hardwired to share stories. Stories provide authentic examples of who and what we are, not just what we say. They can also provide valuable lessons and serve as inspiration. I grew up across the road from the Sydney Cricket Ground. Dad used to take my two siblings and me to *all* the cricket matches. Test matches could be particularly slow for young enthusiasts. So, in between eating ice creams, collecting bat signatures and laughing along to Merv Hughes' stretching antics, dad would explain the intricacies of the game and tell us lots of stories about the players.

As the years went on, my favourite story became the one about the boy who loved playing cricket from a very young age. Both of his parents were busy with work commitments, so the boy's grandmother took it upon herself to pay for and take the young boy to the weekly cricket training. The story goes that the grandmother sewed a special label inside of the boy's cricket top. The label read 'A future Australian cricket captain' and was a constant reminder of his potential.

The course of that boy's life changed forever when someone believed in him enough to nurture both his mindset and talents, and he did indeed pursue a career in professional cricket. That boy went on to be the only Australian cricket captain to lead his team to three successful Ashes victories during the golden era of cricket between 2004 and 2011. That boy is Ricky Ponting. If you're a cricket fan, you may remember that when Ponting's

grandmother died in 2011, the Australian cricket team wore black armbands to honour her.

Why am I telling you this? Because in life and work, sometimes all it takes to start on the road to success is another person to believe in you before you can believe in yourself. This is particularly common as a way of encouraging young children. However, what happens when you grow up? Unfortunately, in today's society, we are seeing a rise in isolation, busyness, flexible working and living alone, making genuine, ongoing connection a challenge for many of us. If that's your reality, then remember that I believe in you and that this book is designed to nudge you in a positive direction.

So, whatever happened to Merv Hughes? Well, he is long retired but has been known to hand out the occasional baggy, green cap to players on debut and is quoted as saying, *'There is an emu and kangaroo on the front of your hat. They never take a step backwards, and I know you won't, either.'* With that in mind, let's find out if you are ready to take your first step forward to *Reimagine Change*.



## A WORD ON PART I

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*'The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking  
new landscapes, but in having new eyes.'*

– MARCEL PROUST

Let's be honest – 'change' is often a despised word. This is largely because so many people have witnessed – and suffered from – poorly managed change. While change management practices have begun to be more human-centric out of necessity, it is often the leadership team and broader cadence of the business that lags lightyears behind. In a world of busyness, change is viewed as burdensome.

As I explained in the introduction, this book is divided into two parts: Part 1 and Part 2. Part 1 is titled 'KNOW', as it's designed to help you grasp the gravity of the situation you are in, both in the workplace and in your head. This will help orient you, so that you can forge a new path for yourself and ultimately achieve success. The focus here is to use data-driven findings and academic insights to enhance your thinking and reflecting time. It is only when the 'what' and the 'why' are compelling enough that you will become ready to take action.

Here are some questions to keep in mind as you move through each chapter in Part 1:

**REALISE your reality:** What is the depth of your emotional experience of change? Chapter 1 gives you permission to re-experience the dark side of change.

**RESPOND via your capability:** What might your best next step forward be? Don't leave choices to chance. Chapter 2 asks you to draw a line in the sand.

**RECLAIM your brain:** How might befriending your brain benefit your journey? Chapter 3 will help you to distinguish between the experiences of stress, overwhelm and homeostasis.

Let's get going!









PART I

# KNOW



## CHAPTER I

## REALISE YOUR REALITY

‘There are no death camps in corporations,  
but many apparently successful companies  
hide great suffering in their basements.’

– FRED KOFMAN

The 1994 movie *The Shawshank Redemption* is praised as the greatest film never to win an Oscar. The film, starring Tim Robbins (portraying Andy Dufresne) and Morgan Freeman (portraying Red), tells the story of a twenty-year relationship between two inmates at Shawshank State Penitentiary. Andy and Red share their unique stories of the harrowing conditions, both physical and mental, and the psyche required to withstand life inside the prison. Through the trials and tribulations, we come to learn from Andy that his greatest motivators of endurance are hope and purpose greater than oneself.

As Andy says, ‘*There are places in this world that aren’t made out of stone... there’s something inside... that they can’t get to, that they can’t touch. That’s yours... Hope.*’ It is hope that motivates Andy to smuggle in a rock hammer and a poster of Rita Hayworth, and then go on to tunnel through the prison walls – a task that

took nineteen years of commitment and consistency before Andy realised his goal of freedom.

By the end of the film, we also see Red's story of transformation unfold. From feeling institutionalised:

*'These walls are funny. First you hate 'em. Then you get used to 'em. Enough time passes, you get so you depend on them. That's institutionalised.'*

... to being in control and taking action:

*'I guess it comes down to a simple choice, really. Get busy living or get busy dying.'*

Right now, you probably feel more hopeless than hopeful. I've been there, too, and know it is an absolute punishment. So, let's have a look at a few of the reasons why initiating and managing change at work has become such a joy thief in your life. Let's start with some simple metaphors, inspired by *The Shawshank Redemption*.

## TRAPPED LIKE A PRISONER

In a hyper-competitive VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) world, change is touted as a constant opportunity for organisations to digitally transform, innovate and create new value offerings for clients. But in your mind, the high volume of change you are experiencing has left you exhausted, overwhelmed and hyper-anxious. Your reality is closer to one of a prison inmate, like Andy and Red in *The Shawshank Redemption*. Continuing with

that metaphor, here are some other notions you may relate to:

### RESISTING ARREST

‘But I didn’t ask for this extra workload or change responsibility – it was pushed down from above.’ Your cries for support have fallen on deaf ears. And the advice from those who have gone before you is that the house always wins where resistance and resources are concerned.

### LIFE SENTENCE

The judge has ruled in favour of ‘change as usual’ (CAU). The rapid pace of change is forever set in motion. You instantly freeze and switch from thriving mode to surviving mode. This activates a constant state of uncertainty, anxiety and fear. It is clear you lack the suitable coping mechanisms.

### GOLDEN HANDCUFFS

With lock-up comes jewellery. Golden handcuffs ensure you endure the change chaos taking place around you. Golden handcuffs represent your salary or annual bonus, which keeps you at the mercy of a stressful job or toxic boss. Like others, you have a mortgage to pay off and family responsibilities. It’s time to focus on ‘getting shit done’.

### PRISONISATION

This is the point where you no longer resist your reality. Over time, you’ve had to learn to adapt. Your once independent nature is now co-dependent on cultural norms, espoused values and groupthink. There are downsides to being institutionalised. You are guarded, distrusting of others and emotionally numb.

### THE USUAL SUSPECTS

In the change failure slammer, you'll find a variety of social misfits. Overworked, overstretched and overwhelmed. They relentlessly shadow you day and night, always watching and always baiting you. This isn't the kind of social support and community spirit you had anticipated.

### TOP DOG

Then there is the infamous top dog or number one. The leader always sets the tone from the top, often sharing need-to-know information just in time. Don't cross the leader – you would do well to appease him or her. When under pressure, most of them are binary in their decision making. They view others as 'capable' or 'incapable' of getting the job done.

### SOLITARY CONFINEMENT

When trust is absent among cell mates, it can be incredibly isolating. You keep your head low and your mouth shut. At night, you lie awake thinking about worst-case scenarios. You know you should be sleeping, but you are too edgy.

### THE GREAT ESCAPE

Out of desperation, you hatch a plan to tunnel your way out. It's a slow and considered strategy, because you have to line a few things up before you have the confidence to actually do it. Hope is the only thing keeping you going now. You file an application for your sabbatical or write your resignation and slip away in the darkness.

These metaphors are designed to help you reflect on your situation. Here, the starkness of the inner mental prison is designed to

highlight the intensity of your subjective emotional experience. Emotions are so often overlooked or labelled as irrelevant – or even detrimental – in the workplace. Most workplaces condition you to hide them, even though this is at odds with the very nature of being human. However, ‘prison talk’ is probably not the type of language that is going to assist you in having a meaningful conversation with your team, your boss or Human Resources!

In the workplace, models remain the preferred communication tool for reframing ideas and sharing narratives. So, I have created a model that is designed to provide you with workplace-appropriate language to help you articulate exactly where you are at and what you are experiencing. Of course, this language isn’t just reserved for conversations with others. You can use it internally, too, to help you better understand your relationship with change.

## THE HUMAN STATES OF CHANGE

Having worked on all sides of change, both being on the receiving end of it (change target) and being responsible for leading large teams (change lead), what I have observed are eight common Human Change States, which influence your personal relationship with change. These are:

- Change Oblivious
- Change Bravado
- Change Anxiety
- Change Resistance
- Change Capable
- Change Frustration

- Change Fatigue
- Change Burnout

Let's look at the Human Change State (HCS) model more closely so that you can assess where you are at (your current reality) and determine where you want to shift to (your desired future).

Figure 3 illustrates the eight Human Change States, based on which 'zone' they belong to (more on this in a minute). These states are not fixed or linear due to the complexity associated with change. In fact, certain change scenarios (such as redundancies, restructuring or resilience upskilling) will cause you to oscillate between the different change states. However, for the most part, you will have a dominant Human Change State that you are currently operating from.

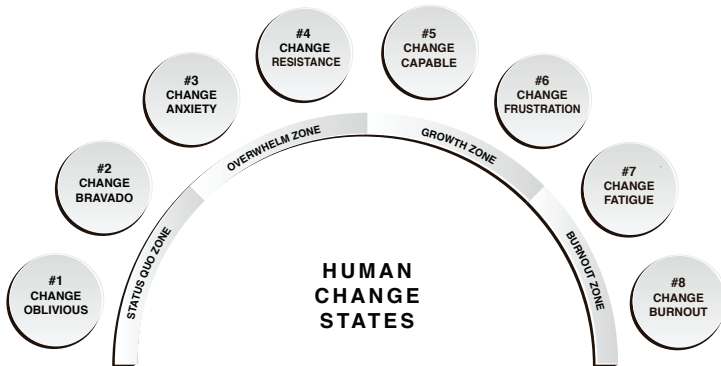


Figure 3: Human change states.

Adapted from Tom Senninger's Learning Zone Model, expanded from Lev Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development.



## STATUS QUO ZONE

In the twenty-first century, organisations and individuals that operate from within the status quo are the greatest enemies of progress. Creativity, collaboration and innovation cannot flourish in these conditions. The status quo zone is home to the first two Human Change States: Change Oblivious and Change Bravado.

### 1. Change Oblivious

Change Oblivious is when you are comfortable with having no, or very limited, awareness and knowledge about change in general. Another way of describing being blissfully unaware is ‘ostriching’ because others may perceive you as having your head in the sand. Your focus is elsewhere and you don’t seem to care.

### 2. Change Bravado

This second state is where you are aware of, but don’t care about, the changes taking place around you. This is a more outwardly confident position that is often referred to as ‘peacocking’. Others may perceive you as being overly secure and egotistical. It is obvious that your focus is not on the change taking place. Internally, though, you intuitively know you are hiding behind this false confidence as an avoidance strategy.

## OVERWHELM ZONE

In both work and life, fear tends to creep up on you in subtle ways. These subtleties cumulate and compound, surfacing in various implicit and explicit forms. The overwhelm zone is where Change Anxiety (implicit form) and Change Resistance (explicit form) reside.

### **3. Change Anxiety**

The third state is where you feel worried and fearful about change specifics or change as a general topic. Both the known and unknown details can result in Change Anxiety. In other words, you worry about information that has been shared. Then you start questioning missing information and often fill in the gaps with assumptions. These assumptions tend to skew towards catastrophising extremes. This is where you default to worst-case scenarios. While this is a primal instinct intended to keep you safe from danger, Change Anxiety is also reflective of a lack of self-confidence and self-worth.

### **4. Change Resistance**

The fourth state is the most commonly discussed and documented term. Change Resistance refers to a state of opposition towards either the change itself or the individuals or leadership team acting as the driving force. It is usually a high-energy, negative state. Those with higher emotional intelligence would self-describe as 'being passionate and constructive', while those with a blind spot are more likely to be labelled by others as 'defensive and change resistant'. This is often viewed as career-limiting behaviour.

## **GROWTH ZONE**

Personal growth can only occur when you leave the status quo zone. It is a fluid state where you stretch and grow through learning and experiences. The growth zone is sustainable when the level of personal stress falls within the optimal range of your 'allostatic load'. This refers to the impact of stress or the 'wear and tear' on your body. In a state of stress, your body mines energy from elsewhere in the body to allow you to adapt and function

in the present. However, if it is repeatedly overloaded, the body will eventually crash, seeking regeneration.

### **5. Change Capable**

The fifth state is the peak state of growth where you are resilient, ready and resourceful in relation to change. If you are not resourceful, then you fall back into either Change Resistance or Change Anxiety. When in the Change Capable state, you embody a sense of hope, real optimism and authentic confidence. You feel supported, connected, informed and upskilled. Without any reservation, you prioritise personal and professional growth over stagnation.

### **6. Change Frustration**

The sixth state refers to your annoyance at the pace of change. From your perspective, it is either too slow or too fast. Frustration is often viewed as a negative. However, this is an important state as it shows that you still have a high level of care for and investment in the change. Nurturing is much more manageable from the Change Frustration state than from the Change Fatigue state. This is usually where the biggest missed opportunities occur in organisations.

## **BURNOUT ZONE**

Nothing good comes from the burnout zone. Trust, respect and connection are in rapid decline, and you feel at odds or misaligned with the organisation's purpose, values and transformation direction. Your brain, mind and body experience the impact of psychological warfare. This will be explored in greater detail later in the book.

### **7. Change Fatigue**

The seventh state elicits physical and mental tiredness as well as a decline in energetic enthusiasm. Take caution. The expression ‘change fatigue’ should not be taken lightly. If this term is commonplace in your organisation, your team or your own vernacular, then you need to shake yourself out of complacency and be on high alert. Change Fatigue is a precursor to change overload and eventual burnout. And what is most concerning is that, much like a health diagnosis, there is no definitive time frame for how quickly your personal fuse will break or melt.

### **8. Change Burnout**

The eighth state is the point of no return. The high velocity and compounding impact of exponential work/life change has overpowered you to the point of job burnout. This is vastly different to being tired after a day’s work or one bad night’s sleep. Burnout is with you twenty-four hours until it is addressed.

#### PAUSE & REFLECT

- Which of the eight Human Change States do you relate most to and why?
- Would others agree with your self-assessment?
- Do you believe that the Human Change State that you are currently operating from is best serving you and your future self?
- Is there another Human Change State that would set you up for success?

(Hint: It’s becoming Change Capable.)

With regard to the eighth state, Change Burnout, sometimes it isn't always obvious that you are actually in this state – simply because you're so strung out and simply trying to get through each day. In the following section, I'll explain how to recognise when you've reached Change Burnout.

## CRASH AND BURN

Close your eyes and imagine blowing out a candle. That unique smell floods your nostrils and you are captivated by the trance-like dance of the smoke moving upwards. And then *click* – in an instant, it's gone. Light one minute, dark the next. This is what burnout can feel like. It can creep up on you – until one day you suddenly crash. The only way to avoid a crash is to address burnout as soon as you recognise it. Figure 4 provides a snapshot of how you recognise when burnout is present in you:



Figure 4: Crash & Burn.

### **You are drowning**

You are experiencing:

- Exhaustion beyond chronic stress (physical, mental and emotional exhaustion)

- Sleep disturbance, including rumination and insomnia
- Cognitive impairment to judgement, decision making and memory retrieval

### **You are disengaged**

You are feeling:

- Under-challenged yet overloaded with work
- Depersonalisation, as shown by your lack of care and concern for your work
- A tendency to default to critical, cynical or apathetic responses

### **You are discouraged**

You are experiencing:

- A lack of professional efficacy (the positive feelings associated with job competency)
- Low autonomy or low recognition
- Isolation as a result of low social connection or out-grouping

In human burnout, as opposed to candle burnout, the smoke spirals downwards rather than up. Indeed, the spiral of descent can be so rapid that it feels uncontrollable. There is a distinct point of no return, a letting go, when you simply succumb to the exhaustion. You are physically and mentally incapable of fighting on the front foot, defending on the back foot or withstanding any form of conflict whatsoever. You are a broken soul and the shame of being found so fractionated consumes you.

Ripples beyond work include insomnia, lowered immunity, physical illness, marital strain and relationship pressures, leading to

mental health challenges, such as anxiety and depression, and even suicide.

For the remainder of the book, I will interchangeably refer to the terms ‘overload’, ‘fatigue’ and ‘burnout’, which encompass the following symptoms:

CHANGE OVERLOAD AND BURNOUT SYMPTOMS	
<p><b>Cognitive</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irritability (defensive/ hyper-sensitive)</li> <li>• Poor decision making (clouded judgement/ memory concerns)</li> <li>• Rigid thinking (absence of creative/critical thinking)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Emotional</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotion-full to emotion-less (human being to corporate robot)</li> <li>• Spiralling (frustration to anger to apathy)</li> <li>• Learned helplessness (lacking hope)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Behavioural</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sleep irregularities (ruminating and waking at 2am)</li> <li>• Increased isolation (seeking refuge via withdrawal)</li> <li>• Presenteeism followed by absenteeism</li> </ul>	<p><b>Physical</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exhaustion (apparent at the start of the day)</li> <li>• Stress symptoms (change in heart rate and breathing)</li> <li>• Lowered immune system (resulting in more general ailments)</li> </ul>
<p><b>Personality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type A skewed (ambitious workaholics)</li> <li>• Perfectionist (mistrusting and controlling)</li> <li>• Vice seeking (alcohol, drugs, smoking, shopping, screen time and people pleasing)</li> </ul>	<p><b>Spiritual</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loss of purpose (the cause that inspires you)</li> <li>• Diminished sense of career enjoyment</li> <li>• Questioning spirituality and quality of relationships</li> </ul>

Being expected to thrive in times of uncertainty and change is no easy feat. If it were, you would be thriving in your job and excited about the future.

Change used to be exciting and bring with it great promise. However, right now, change is having the opposite effect. If you are currently experiencing any of the symptoms outlined in the table, then my heart goes out to you. It is not a good place to be in, even if temporary.

Remember that my role is not to enable or empower you. That would be very self-righteous of me. Instead, I want you to liberate yourself. So, I will provide you with a variety of methods and insights for you to test out and see what works for you. Conscious awareness provides you with the ability to navigate your own unique journey at a pace and tone that aligns with what you need to *hear, feel* and *experience* in that moment.

## ALL IT TAKES IS PRESSURE AND TIME

Psychologist Herbert Freudenberger is thought to have conducted the first piece of burnout research in 1974. However, only as recently as 2019 has the World Health Organization (WHO) declared that burnout is a 'workplace syndrome'. This suggests that more research and preventative measures will arise in the future.

A 2019 study from Kronos, published by *Forbes*, identified that key burnout indicators could be attributed to poor management (thirty per cent), employees not seeing how their role connects to



corporate strategy (twenty-nine per cent), and a negative workplace culture (twenty-six per cent). This study highlights the fact that organisations, teams and individuals must all be held accountable for the rise in burnout. Collective sponsorship, action and measures should be prioritised to prevent it from becoming a twenty-first century epidemic.

The American Psychological Association's (APA) 2017 Work and Well-Being Survey of 1,500 workers found that leadership often underestimates the impact that organisational changes have on employees:

*'Workers experiencing recent or current change were more than twice as likely to report chronic work stress compared with employees who reported no recent, current or anticipated change (55 percent vs. 22 percent), and more than four times as likely to report experiencing physical health symptoms at work (34 percent vs. 8 percent).*

*'Working Americans who reported recent or current change were more likely to say they experienced work-life conflict (39 percent vs. 12 percent for job interfering with non-work responsibilities and 32 percent vs. 7 percent for home and family responsibilities interfering with work), [and] felt cynical and negative toward others during the workday (35 percent vs. 11 percent)...*

*'For organisations to successfully navigate turbulent times, they need resilient employees who can adapt to change... To build trust and engagement, employers need to focus on building a psychologically healthy workplace where employees are*

*actively involved in shaping the future and confident in their ability to succeed.'*

Brent Gleeson, in a *Forbes* article titled '1 Reason Why Most Change Management Efforts Fail', writes:

*'Change battle fatigue is the result of many elements such as past failures plaguing the minds of employees and the sacrifices made during the arduous change process. When a transformation is poorly led, fatigue can set in quickly. And not only do 70% of organisational transformations fail, but that failure rate may even be increasing. According to 2008 research from IBM, the need to lead change is growing, but our ability to do it is shrinking. Hence why people often get discouraged and eventually give up.'*

In a TEDx Talk titled 'Burnout and post-traumatic stress disorder', Dr. Geri Puleo shared her PhD research on burnout due to organisational change, stating, *'The similarities between burnout and Post Traumatic Stress, PTSD, are shocking. In fact, I'm a firm believer that burnout is a form of PTSD.'*

Similarities include a decline in health, personal relationships turning sour, fear and hopelessness responses, depression and withdrawal, irritability and mood changes, residual burnout where you re-live the experience, and so on.

Dr. Puleo's research shows the descent down to burnout, due to organisational change, takes an average of six months for change targets and one to two years for change leaders. Meanwhile, the ascent out of burnout, or the recovery phase, averages two years,

meaning that it takes longer for the individual to feel ‘whole’ again.

Dr. Puleo’s research argues that poor leadership and lack of organisational caring easily outranks work overload as the leading cause of burnout. ‘Organisational caring’ can be defined as a structure of values and organising principles centred on fulfilling employees’ needs, promoting employees’ best interests and valuing employees’ contributions. Is this a unicorn term or have you experienced this firsthand? If you are reading this book, I’m guessing not.

In a *Harvard Business Review* article titled ‘Employee Burnout Is a Problem with the Company, Not the Person’, Eric Garton argues:

*‘Executives need to own up to their role in creating the workplace stress that leads to burnout... Unchecked organisational norms insidiously create the conditions for burnout—but leaders can change them to make burnout less likely.’*

You may have been advised that how you approach and handle workplace change will better position you for your next career leap or more generally for the future of work. This is the equivalent of telling graduate intakes that they are ‘special’, or the ‘chosen ones’, to anchor a baseline of fear within them, so that they don’t fall below a certain threshold of standards.

This is a call to arms that we all need to get better at recognising and expressing emotions in ourselves and others. Labelling the Human Change States associated with change overload and burnout is only the tip of the iceberg.

This new knowledge will also act as a roadmap towards empathy

and compassion. To better understand how others around you experience human suffering. It can assist you in commencing coaching conversations with others who are having a tough time coping with change. Remember that role-modelling more human qualities will be regarded as a strength in the future workplace – one that should be spotlighted and not ignored or minimised.

## THE DANGER OF EMOTIONAL CONTAGION

Emotions are often defined as *energy in motion*. They are more powerful than most people give them credit for. They range from joyful and constructive to fear-inducing and destructive. Your emotional data and emotions themselves are always being transmitted.

Emotional contagion is when a person or group's emotions trigger similar emotions, moods and behaviours in another person or group. Through subconscious processing of facial expressions, vocal tone and other readable body language, the person or group 'catches' and 'mimics' the emotions that are energetically charging the environment. Specifically, your subconscious mind is always noticing, interpreting and predicting what is taking place around you. This refers to the full spectrum of emotions, including joy, anger and distress.

In the book *Contagious You*, author Anese Cavanaugh states, '*Your Contagion Factor is how contagious you are, how far it will ripple, how positively or negatively so, and how likely you'll then be to create the result you want.*'

From an evolutionary psychology perspective, mirror neurons ensured you had the ability to connect with others and connect with the tribe at large. You see, back in tribal days, we were not self-sustaining and needed the tribe to keep us safe from enemies. From a neuroscientific perspective, it is the mirror neurons in our brain that enable ‘catching’ or ‘mirroring’. Mirror neurons fire even when they are orchestrating and not doing an action. In an article titled ‘Do Mirror Neurons Give Us Empathy?’ Vilayanur Ramachandran, professor of neuroscience at the University of California, states:

*‘A subset of these neurons also fire when I simply watch another person—watch you reach out and do exactly the same action. So, these neurons are performing a virtual reality simulation of your mind, your brain. Therefore, they’re constructing a theory of your mind—of your intention—which is important for all kinds of social interaction.’*

Ramachandran goes on to use the example of how anterior cingulate neurons fire when he pokes his thumb with a needle:

*‘It turns out these anterior cingulate neurons that respond to my thumb being poked will also fire when I watch you being poked—but only a subset of them. There are non-mirror neuron pain neurons and there are mirror neuron pain neurons.’*

*‘So, these [mirror] neurons are probably involved in empathy for pain. If I really and truly empathise with your pain, I need to experience it myself. That’s what the mirror neurons are doing, allowing me to empathise with your pain—saying,*

*in effect, that person is experiencing the same agony and excruciating pain as you would if somebody were to poke you with a needle directly. That's the basis of all empathy.'*

Note that while emotional contagion is one of many elements of empathy, it is not empathy in its entirety. Empathy is a choice to engage in while emotional contagion is an automatic response. More like a fast, reflective action.

The implications of emotional contagion influence your mental wellbeing. For example, if your leaders are not making tough people calls, and taking a stand on culture as part of business transformation and organisational change efforts, then leave. Emotional contagion confirms that no matter how much personal development work you do, you will still be at risk of snapping back and undoing all your efforts when you re-enter a dysfunctional culture.

In a *Psychology Today* article titled 'Protect Yourself from Emotional Contagion', Elaine Hatfield, co-author of the pioneering, academic book *Emotional Contagion* and a professor of psychology at the University of Hawaii, stated:

*'Repeatedly catching negative emotions from the people in our lives can create a miasma – preventing us from seeing the contagion or its cause. Instead, we sense we're in an unhealthy environment. And in worst-case scenarios, emotional contagion leads to harmful actions.'*

## PAUSE & REFLECT

- Have you experienced emotional contagion firsthand?
- Was it a positive or negative experience?
- Was it short-lived or long-lasting?
- Can you pinpoint major contributors?
- Being honest with yourself, have you ever been the instigator?

Workplace stress is nothing new. However, what is concerning is the speed with which stress is being replaced by the spread of emotional contagion and burnout.

## REACHING OUT MATTERS

When change overload and burnout are ignored or minimised, there can be mental health repercussions. Should you be concerned about your mental health or have a diagnosable clinical disorder, please seek professional help from your GP.

*Reimagine Change* is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis or treatment. Always refer to a mental health professional or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have. The following contacts have been sourced from Healthdirect Australia, a national, government-owned, not-for-profit organisation.

**Lifeline** provides twenty-four-hour crisis counselling, support groups and suicide prevention services. Call 13 11 14.

**Suicide Call Back Service** provides twenty-four-hour, seven-days-a-week support if you or someone you know is feeling suicidal. Call 1300 659 467.

**Beyond Blue** aims to increase awareness of depression and anxiety, and reduce stigma. Call 1300 22 46 36.

**MensLine Australia** is a professional telephone and online support and information service for Australian men. Call 1300 789 978.

**MindSpot** is a free telephone and online assessment service for people with stress, worry, anxiety, low mood or depression. MindSpot is not an emergency or instant response service. Call 1800 614 434.

**SANE Australia** provides support, training and education, enabling those with a mental illness to lead a better life. Call 1800 187 263.



## CHAPTER SUMMARY

That brings us to the end of Chapter 1. By now, you should have gathered some valuable insights and data to help you realise that what you are seeing, feeling and experiencing is not unique to you. Unfortunately, it is more commonplace than most individuals and organisations imagine.

In Chapter 2, we'll discuss how to shift from 'Now that I know' to 'What am I going to do about it?' and 'Why would that be of value to me?' Before we dive into that, let's review the key points discussed in Chapter 1:

- There are eight Human Change States that aspiring change leaders can experience:
  - > Change Oblivious
  - > Change Bravado
  - > Change Anxiety
  - > Change Resistance
  - > Change Capable
  - > Change Frustration
  - > Change Fatigue
  - > Change Burnout
- Addressing change fatigue is increasingly important. When left unaddressed, an individual's change capacity or change bandwidth will eventually reach a tipping point.
- Research shows the descent down to burnout, due to organisational change, takes an average of six months for change

targets (those impacted by change) and one to two years for change leaders (those leading change efforts).

- Recognise the onset of burnout starts with three lead indicators – you are drowning, disengaged and discouraged. Don't ignore these indicators during difficult times.
- Thanks to the mirror neurons in your brain, emotional contagion is a contributing factor to triggering and retriggering change fatigue and burnout in individuals and teams.
- When change overload and burnout are ignored or minimised, this can significantly impact your mental health. For mental health support, including a referral to a mental health professional, please speak to your GP.