Ross Dickie 0:08
Hello, you're listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast developed to help you build your leadership and management skills. I'm Ross Dickie.

Ross Garner 0:14
I'm Ross Garner.

Ross Garner 0:15
This week, we're asking what is change management? And why is it important to Anglo American? To answer these questions, were speaking to change management specialist Nicola Cohen how's it going Nicola?

Nicola Cohen 0:26
Good, thanks, how you doing?

Ross Garner 0:27
Very well. Thank you. So to get us started, start with a very basic question. What exactly is change management?

Nicola Cohen 0:35
Really good question. So, thinking about the organisation called prophesy, who are change management theories, if you like, their definition of change management is the application of a structured process and set of tools for leading the people side of change to to achieve a desired outcome.

So it's obviously quite a sort of an academic description of what change management is. But if I give you an example that might tie in and make that come to life a bit, so if you think about Anglo American, we are an organisation of engineers. And we're really good at implementing technical changes. So let's, for example, take something like something we've recently recently put into our light vehicle. So we've put in an Adas kind of technical initiative in our cabs, and Adas is automated driver assistance system.

So it does things like it monitors how fast a driver is driving, it looks at whether that driver is dozing off or going to sleep. And it also does things like it has a kind of a breathalyser tests at the beginning of the journey. So that a das System is really important to Anglo American to keep us all safe to keep drivers

safe, to keep passengers safe, and also to keep people within the community safe.

So change management in that context is really about not just putting that piece of kit into our into our vehicles, which is what the technical side of the changes, so physically, getting the getting the vehicles into an area, putting those pieces that piece of tech into the into the cabs, you know, it's about the people side. So how do the people who are driving that vehicle, know that one, that they the tech is in their cabs, and to why that tech is in there, and three, how they engage with that tech. So you could quite easily put that ticking the cab, not tell the drivers about it, not get them to understand why it's there, and not get them to use it properly. And that would be called failed change.

Successful change in that context would be letting them know upfront that the technical technology is coming, letting them know why we're putting that technology in there. So we're putting in there for their safety for the community safety for passenger safety, and then letting them know how they use it. So before you start the car, make sure you do your breathalyser test, while you're driving, if you start to go over the speed limit, and alarm off sound, so that will tell you to slow down. If you start to doze off, there will again be an alarm that will sound to tell you that you know you're dozing off and and so to make you more alert.

And then as a consequence of any kinds of driving incident, data will go back to the centre, the mind site, and you'll be coached around that afterwards. So we'll be able to say to you, you know, we saw that your drive your driving was off this afternoon. Let's talk about that. Why did that happen? And how can we address that going forward? So that's an example of change management, if that makes sense. Yeah, it's,

Ross Garner 3:57
it's it's interesting that people are foregrounded in change management, because I think when you just change management, even the term itself can sound like a technical discipline. But the way you described it there as a definition that you use made it seem far more like a people discipline. And when

I was preparing for this podcast, it was I was reflecting that it's like, we've all been on a two year long change management course, with COVID.

Because this because it changed everyone's lives all over the world. And the technical side of that has actually been relatively easy. So businesses have been shut down for a lot of money's been provided. You can't leave your house in certain places.

There's restrictions on travel, all that kind of stuff is quite easy, because you can just shut stuff down and remove the option for people. But what's been difficult is there was a mandate to wear masks, and then those were removed. You don't have to wear a mask anymore. And what's happened there is that there's it's been open to interpretation. People can decide what they want to do themselves.

There's a hearts and minds piece. It's got all wrapped up in identity. And the difficult part of change management is the hearts and minds piece right? So can you bring people along with us because he can either support the change, and then that helps embed the technical side of it. Or they can resist the change and make everyone's lives difficult for years to come as a fair assessment?

Nicola Cohen 5:13
Oh, it's totally fair and interesting that you use that example, because I was going to use COVID as an example. But then I thought, well, we'll set up a talking about coded but

Ross Dickie 5:21
I know, it's always one of these things is like, yeah, it's the QI alarm whenever someone mentions COVID.

Ross Garner 5:27
And you can count on me to go for the most obvious example.

nic 5:32
No, so but I think it's a really good example. And I think what the kind of COVID

scenario has really driven home for me, in relation to change management is, while there was obviously a really compelling case for change, so there was absolutely a reason why we had to stay inside while we had to wear masks, or we had to get vaccinated all of those things. When rules were changed.

I felt that government rarely communicated and engaged us in the why those rules were changing, and helping us to understand why those while those rules, rules are changing. So you know, one minute, you had to wear a mask the next minute you didn't, and there was no kind of rationale behind it, you were just supposed to accept that that was the way it was and to kind of take your order and crack on with it.

And that's what, that's the mistake we often make with change management, we say we're going to put a new piece of technology into the organisation, we're going to change your working rules and conditions. But we won't explain the why. And human beings can't cope with that. They have to know why they're doing something. And then once there's a compelling reason, invariably, they go along with it, right?

Ross Dickie 6:45
Yeah, I think, kind of interested. So the first example you gave about implementing that new technology that was sort of something that you proactively decided to do, you identified a need that can be met by new technology, and then sort of explained to people in the organisation, what it would mean for them, how it helped keep them safe.

And the COVID example, that's something that you didn't plan for, but it was still needed to make changes to adapt to. So yeah, I was just curious on your thoughts on those sort of two different types of changes within organisations where, on the one hand, there's changes that you're basically deciding to make, and others that are more kind of environmental fighters that you as an organisation don't have that much control for? And how do you communicate those to your people? Yeah,

Nicola Cohen 7:31
Yeah, I mean, I think the key to that is, is having a change management

methodology and process in place so that you're never blindsided by change that comes urgently and surprises you. So, you know, invariably, we work on plans change. You know, we're an engineering company that we are changing.

Nicola Cohen 7:55
Yeah, we know, well, we know what's coming. And you know, when we're doing stuff, like putting Adas into our, into our vehicles, you know, we know that's coming, because we've had to, you know, put the piece of business out for, you know, for pitch and people and provide us a comeback.

And they've given us the costings, and blah, blah, blah, so we know, that's coming COVID surprised us, all right, surprise, surprise, the whole world. But, you know, we were able to rise to the challenge, because we had, we had people in the organisation who were on point to engage, we had medical experts who could come up with our policies and our procedures.

And we very quickly learned how to use all of the infrastructure that we have in place to make people aware of how they need to change in response to COVID at work, and also persuade them that it was the right thing to do, you know, and then adopting those behaviours came along with that. So we were able to lever things like, you know, let's, let's make sure that we test people's temperatures before they get on the coaches to get to the site, you know, let's hand out masks to people, let's, you know, enable them to make the changes by providing them with all the kit necessary.

So I'm not saying it wasn't something that we had to quickly act upon. But we were able to rise to the challenge because of the infrastructure we have in place.

Ross Dickie 9:22
And beyond the sort of. So I guess you're communicating change is an important part. And my Ross was saying the sort of the people element sort of getting people to understand why the change is happening, what it means for them, and how hopefully, it's going to make their working lives better.

That's obviously an important part of that. And sort of embedding change initiatives for what are some of the other reasons that change efforts might feel is it seems like not having a consistent methodology in place like you, like you mentioned in relation to COVID?

Nicola Cohen 9:54
Well, I think there's the methodology piece if you haven't got the expertise within the organisation and the processes and the tools to implement the change, then, you know, obviously, you haven't got the kind of fundamentals in place, but assuming you've got that in place, and most large organisations, you know, have some exposure to some extensive change capacity within the organisation, I think, you know, the, the most common reasons for for change to fail is resistance to change.

So, you know, thinking about that COVID example, people's natural inclination is to, is to resist change, even if they're uncomfortable with the current scenario, people resist change, and all sorts of reasons why they would resist change. So there's that lack of awareness piece, we were talking about just them, there's the, I don't like or agree with the change, there's, I'm fed up with change, I'm saturated by change, you know, there's too much going on. And I cannot cope with one more thing. There's also fear of change. So people do like, routine people do like, habit. So they fear change. But you know, as a concept, they don't like that they don't embrace it.

And also, leaders, managers don't sufficiently support the change that's coming. So with that aid, as example that I just shared, if the supervisors and the leaders of those drivers that need to use the aid as kits to keep everybody safe, if those supervisors and leaders didn't support or don't support the drivers and really drive home, the benefits and you know, coach them on good behaviour, bad behaviour, then change won't lend very well.

So I would say that, you know, resistance to change is a really apparent, you know, a really kind of a reason for change, failing. That is, it's constant, it's been constant throughout my career. And it's constant in what in whatever change that we put in place in Anglo. That's why you need a change management methodology. And that's why you need to take people through a journey of

understanding the rationale for the change the reason for it, and kind of moving them slowly through it

Ross Garner 12:11
I wonder if we might talk about the management PCs, because I think that's quite interesting, I'm conscious, it might be useful for the audience here. So the probably in the like, the people you're closest to within any organisation is, your manager is going to be among them, they're gonna be the one that you interact with most.

And much more than senior management or other teams, you're looking to them for a signals for what's like acceptable behaviour, and what's going to be rewarded, and what's going to be an issue and so on. So to what extent do you think managers have a responsibility for promoting change efforts, even if they don't agree with them? So if they have reservations, that might be something they bring up with their manager, but then on the filtering down and disseminating it to the wider population? How responsible? Are they for that? You kind of laughed as I asked that question.

Nicola Cohen 13:03
Well, I think that I think that survey after survey would tell you that your line manager is the person that you look to as your most trusted source of information and role modelling, right, so you can have the most senior leader in the organisation tell you that there's a good reason to do something.

But if your line manager isn't matching that behaviour, and reinforcing those messages, then you're gonna have a bit of cognitive dissonance, aren't you, you're gonna say, I can't make sense of that, because he or she is telling me, that's a good thing to do. And then my line manager level, he or she is telling me not telling me anything, or telling me it's not a good thing to do. So they are absolutely key, which is why a fundamental tenant of change management is to focus on line managers and to say, you know, probably in an ideal scenario, how can you get those, that group of people on board with the change before you do anything that involves their people, and that's absolutely key and, you know, you would be you would be wanting to deal with those areas of resistance in the line manager population, before you go to their people and deal with their areas of resistance.

Because what you can then do, is you can have line managers who've already anticipated the area of resistance because they've gone through it themselves, and then they can answer a particular question. So, you know, person in their, in their team saying, I'm not sure that we should be using this aid us. Technology, you know, it feels a little bit big brother, the line manager has already already gone through that kind of thought process, the change managers, the communicators, the people that can influence influence, those people have already sat them down and had a conversation about that. So yeah, I would, I would say that they're absolutely vital to get on board.

Ross Garner 14:56
And when you talk about dealing with major concerns, do you You mean, taking those concerns on board and fashion them into the process? Or, or convincing them that they're wrong?

Nicola Cohen 15:10
Yeah. So I think that, you know, my philosophy around change management is that change starts with a conversation, that any think about any change in life, you know, women becoming, you know, priests, you know, women getting the vote anything. It starts with a conversation, it starts with people thinking about the concept that something could change, actually, could women become priests?

Yeah, I think they could actually or I, let's start having a conversation about that. You know, and within that conversation, you, you hear both sides of an argument, and you are able to address people's concerns, but you don't necessarily address people's concerns. By changing your routes, sometimes you have to hold on to your argument, and you have to hold on to the what is believed to be the right thing to do and keep going.

What most people want in an in a scenario of change is to be listened to, to feel that they've been heard, not necessarily to always be agreed with, you know, it's just human nature, that people want to express themselves. They're not robots. You know, we don't work in the army where we can tell our people what to do, and they just obey, we

Ross Garner 16:37
there's a degree if that in the army as well.

Speaker 1 16:40
Yeah, but it would be subdued and suppressed, and you would have people resenting what was what was happening? Because they're not able to express themselves

Ross Garner 16:52
in the armed forces in

Nicola Cohen 16:53
this hierarchy, but you know, yeah, I mean, I think that, um, the, the thought that good change management is about making resistance disappear, is not the right thing. It's about mitigating that resistance. So you might have to accept me know, there's a pocket of people who are being impacted by this change, who are never going to agree with it, but the best thing we can do is have a conversation with them, hear them, and maybe keep going back and saying, Look, how's it going, actually, in your experience, because at the beginning, you were really antsy, X, Y, and Z. But how do you feel now?

You know, maybe they check, no, maybe through experience, they'll actually turn around and saying, You know what, that was? That was the right thing to do. Yeah, I can see it.

Ross Garner 17:44
And it feels like something's being done to them or more like their to contribute to that process.

Nicola Cohen 17:48
Absolutely, yeah. Yeah.

Ross Dickie 17:51
Yeah. No, I think that's a really important point, I think I think you hit the nail on the head, it's often we talk about change management and resistance to change. It's always about something to be your resistance is seen as something

to overcome. But it's, it's likely that you're going to with a major change initiative that you're going to get everybody on board and thinking that something is a wonderful idea.

Change. I think resistance changes is natural, I think we're sort of wired to find patterns and things that we're comfortable with and sort of stick to them. And anything that takes us away from that. I mean, I was complaining to my wife the other day, how we've changed the sponges that we use in our kitchen, because I don't quite like the way that it works compared to our old sponge is such a trivial thing. But like, I think we would just you get used to working or living in certain ways. And anything that takes you away from that. Yeah, kind of extinct a bit of getting used to.

So I think when you say is like making sure people feel supported through that change pressure when my wife can do it, but supporting me through the changes with the sponges but even

Ross Garner 18:51
in your household, don't they?

Nicola Cohen 18:53
They do. A lot. This is what happens when you locked in the house for two years sponges become really important thing

Ross Dickie 19:01
is the cost yet we're easing me into it

Nicola Cohen 19:05
Yeah, I mean, that's like the point there is you know, that people like to know about things. So I remember when we went away on holiday once and unbeknownst to my daughter, we we got a builder in to change the colour of our front door. And she was so shocked and upset that we changed the colour of the front door, because we just hadn't warned her about it. And just sometimes you just don't think about things like that, that people get attached to stuff, right? Even if it's sponges.

Ross Dickie 19:34

Yeah. Yeah. If only I think of if I think of a changes that happen in our organisation. I think the ones that I've felt most positively about, even if it's something that I don't necessarily agree with are the ones that I feel like we've been included in the process from the beginning. And it's not something that's been sort of foisted upon your communicator kind of at the last minute. Yep, Agree. Agree. Do you have any change horror stories you can share possibly not in the context of Anglo American but

Nicola Cohen 20:03
Never no. I have, I was smiling to myself when I thought about this question because there are so many actually, and I think that is because

Ross Dickie 20:19
it's never easy

Nicola Cohen 20:21
facing never easy, and it involves people, right? You know, if you just take on the technical, technological side of the change, it's easy to change care, it's easy to move people from one building to another, if you've got a good kind of project plan in place, but getting people to go with you on that journey isn't necessarily easy.

It was, as we've just discussed, but so I worked with an organisation that was headquarters, not in the UK, and they wanted to sell the UK arm of the organisation to essentially a competitor. So you know, the arch rival of this of this UK organisation that had been established in the UK, for over 20 years, people had worked there, you know, kind of man and boy kind of thing. It was a very, it was an organisation everybody was very fond of, and really enjoyed working there. But this kind of awful thing was going to happen to them, and I was brought in to manage the change and manage the communications and, you know, harken back to the thing we were talking about, you know, giving people notice, helping people to understand why the changes happen, etc, etc.

And there were absolutely valid reasons for this happening, you know, the economy was really struggling, the parent organisation was really struggling, they just had to do this, they had to get some cash in the organisation. But the scenario was that the parent organisation felt that they couldn't bring the

people into the, into the know, before there had been an announcement made to the market.

So they were fully prepared for the staff that had worked there for in some occasions, for kind of 25 years, plus, to find out the first notification they had about this change was going to be through them looking at Reuters, or reading it in the local press, or reading in the national press.

And the parent organisation were absolutely adamant about that. And you can understand, it's understandable, you know, this is a listed company, and it needed to protect, or, you know, it protects itself in all those appropriate ways. However, you know, in the UK, we really rallied against that. And we said that we couldn't do that it was, first of all, it was disrespectful. And secondly, we actually needed those employees to go with the competitive company and carry on working for them. And, you know, to keep the business, you know, viable and keep the wheels turning.

So you couldn't, you know, let that happen, you couldn't give those employees notification via Reuters, etc. So what we ended up doing was bringing the staff into a variety of rooms within the building and telling them the story, as a story was going out to the financial press, and then kind of making sure that, you know, they didn't leave leave the room until the markets were appropriately notified.

So, you know, that allowed us to set the tone for the change. So that, you know, we knew that it wasn't, it wasn't good news for them individually, but we respected them as people. And we were able to ensure that, you know, they felt that we respected them, because they were the first to find out. And that was, I guess, a story, not a horror story that happened, but a horror story in the making that if we hadn't have employed those, let's make people aware of this thing. You know, let's get them to understand you know, a little bit about it before we launch it upon them.

Ross Garner 23:56
And it's not like it was that intervention that you took the decision you took to

tell people in the room made that change an easy process. But it would have helped the overcoming resistance to change and making people feel included is still going to be difficult for everyone. Because it's a difficult situation. Yeah. So it's not like you can just remove that difficulty. Whereas what can you do to make it easier for everyone involved?

Nicola Cohen 24:18
What can you do to make it easier for everyone involved?

Ross Garner 24:23
Like I was like, interpreting what happened was you were you were, yeah, no,

Nicola Cohen 24:26
absolutely. And yeah, that's all you can do, or that's all you can do is set the tone from the beginning from the get go and, you know, make them feel that they're respected. You know, when I did my Master's in organisational behaviour, one of the things that I focused on was a concept of organisational justice.

So people like to see reciprocity in an organ in their relationship with their employer. So I do work for you. You pay me but you also treat me well and then or treat you well when it kind of you have to Slowly balance in life. And when things like change happen people look for that for for justice. So they say is what is what is happening being done in a just way. And even if it's if it's a bad scenario, they still look for justice. And I think that showed it, no

Ross Dickie 25:18
Okay, let's wrap up. Ross, what will you be taking away from this conversation and applying in your life this week,

Ross Garner 25:24
I've already been leading any, like major change efforts to the next week. So we're asked this slightly differently and just see that I think the importance of managers is key, I think that's what really struck me come up like three or four times in that conversation there, that the managers don't support the change, then no one's going to support the change. And so really focusing on working with them early on, before you have the kind of wider rollout.

Yeah, I think, for me, it is this idea that resistance is not something that you're going to completely get rid of eradicate, it's not like a problem to be solved. It is a something to mitigate. But it's not something you're ever going to completely get rid of. So I think approaching it from that perspective, I think is something I'll be taking away from this conversation. Nicola, what about what about you?

Nicola Cohen 26:10
Um, I think our takeaway from this conversation actually how passionate I feel about this. You know, I just really believe that it's, it's just so important to get this stuff, right, because I guess I care about how people are impacted by changes at work, because I understand that work is so important to all of us as human beings, and that we need to bring humanity into work. And you know, I feel that good change management does that.

Ross Dickie 26:49
So before we go, just got time for a regular feature. One thing I've learned this week, Ross, do you want to go first?

Ross Garner 26:55
I will indeed. So I read a piece in Atlas Obscura this week, which is an online magazine, but astrophysicist Robert Schwartz, who spent 15 winters at the South Pole. And by winter, I mean a six months of neverending darkness from mid February onwards with no possibility of leaving, because there are no flights during that entire period. So in the piece is a joke, because the first time you went to this for the adventure, the second time was for the money. And the third time is because you no longer fit in anywhere else.

You have to spend your entire winter, doing your work, obviously, whatever that might be. In his case, he was fixing telescopes, but also fixing everything else because it's impossible to get new parks. So you have to be very resilient and work out ways to solve problems while you're there. But they do have some fun activities.

So sunsets do watch all three versions of the film The thing about an Antarctic research station where the crew get ripped apart by an alien and altered on

one another. And they can join the 300 Club, which is where you jog. They do that every night as the sunset. The Welcome to winter they have Jonathan Yeah. And then he also joined the 300 club. So this is where you jog from a 200 degrees Fahrenheit sauna to the 100 degree below zero South Pole marker, and then back again. So not for everyone.

Nicola Cohen 28:22
Yeah, we've got some a that's not not what watching the thing is. That's a terrible, terrifying film. I can't believe they did that in that scenario.

Ross Dickie 28:31
I've never seen it. I don't like scary.

Nicola Cohen 28:37
Terrifying but great.

Ross Dickie 28:40
Nicola, what did you learn this week?

Nicola Cohen 28:42
So I had a really good experience this week. That is a form of learning, right? So the weekend I visited the Carl Faberge exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, which if you haven't been catch it, if you can, it's the most beautiful possessions and things are on display there.

You know, just you know, in Lord of the Rings where, you know, he looks at the ring, everyone looks at the rings and calls it precious and can't help looking at it. It's that kind of thing. If you had a piece of Faberge, you'd be doing the same thing. You couldn't help looking at it every day. So beautiful. But anyway, so Faberge was famously responsible for producing 52 jewelled eggs for the Russian royal family. There were about 46 of those eggs surviving today. Some had disappeared after the Russian Revolution, you know, never to be seen again and some like tragically had been melted down.

But interesting story in 2015, a scrap metal trader from the Midwest of the United States had bought a small gold clock that was contained within a gold egg that he had originally wanted to melt down in the hope of making 500

dollars. He had some sick Google he apparently he got like a disappointing price for the first kind of attempt that he'd made it thinking, you know, he could sell this gold if he melted it down. So he happened to Google the details of the egg and specifically, the clockmaker was a friend of famous French clockmaker in addition to the other stuff that was around it.

And he discovered that he was in possession of one in one of the missing Faberge, Faberge eggs. That egg went on to be valued at more than 20 million pounds. Yeah. And it was there. It's there at the exhibition and interestedly in the in the legs of the clock, there were the scratch marks from where he was trying to test the value of imagine. Yeah.

Ross Dickie 30:51
So mine this week is I'm preparing to run marathon this year, first marathon. And I just finished reading what he talks about when I talk about running by Haruki Murakami, which is about sort of broadly about the relationship between long distance running and writing. It's ostensibly a book about running but really, I think about his writing process and this kind of overlap between his love of running and his the beginnings of his literary career.

But one of the things that stood out from the book for me was this quote, which is, pain is inevitable suffering is optional. I don't think that he coined that phrase, and he's taking that from somewhere else. But it's basically about the idea that if you're going to run long distance, you're going to suffer pain at some point.

Whether you choose to continue suffering, that is your choice. I think often when people who don't like running, I talked to people about running, they're like, why do you do this kind of miserable. For me, part of the point is overcoming the misery and the pain. It's the satisfaction that comes with choosing to do it and overcoming that. So it's possibly a bit of a link there to change as well. Very nice.

And is it even listening to the Future Talent Learning podcast with me, Ross Dickie and Ross Garner. Our guest this week was Nicola Cohen, thanks for listening. Bye for now.