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HOW TO MANAGE CHANGE WELL

Shaping Culture; Behaviours, Systems and Symbols

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Our favourite definition of culture is simply...

The way we do things around here.

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Introduction.

Culture is a key part of driving any organisational change, and something many of our clients ask us about. Often people mean different things when they describe culture and it can be difficult to pin down. Our favourite definition of culture is:

“the way we do things around here”.

When planning a change programme, the people side of change often gets neglected. Organisations put a lot of time, effort and planning into changes around technology, staffing structures and processes, but often don’t fully consider the impact on their people and culture. It is, in fact, the impact on people and culture that make all the difference in the success of a change programme.

Very early in my career I helped a team to automate part of their invoicing process. I designed a digital tool for them that would cut their processing time in half. They thanked me and started using the tool. Weeks later I visited the office again and noticed many paper invoices lying around. When I asked why they were there they replied “Oh don’t worry! We use your system too!”. They had adopted the new system while carrying on with the old! This was a big lesson in introducing change without fully understanding the impact and not planning for the behaviour change we also needed.

Although this was many years ago it’s a mistake I often see repeated by organisations today.

Lucy Trueman, Managing Director

The Change Tool.

At Trueman Change we use two simple tools in all our change programmes:

- Shaping Culture: Behaviours, Systems and Symbols
- Simply asking “what will be different ”

This paper is around the behaviours, systems and symbols model, based on the work of Caroline Taylor (2005) and describes three key mechanisms by which culture is shaped and messages are communicated. What we like about this model, is that often when people talk about culture, they are only really referring to behaviour, and this model encourages us to think wider than this.

The model works well when you have some thoughts about what you want your change programme to achieve but need to think a bit deeper into what the impact really will be, and how you can ensure its success!

The model works through three key areas of culture:

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Behaviour.

The most obvious aspect of culture is behaviours. Take a look around your organisation and consider, what behaviours do you see? Look at staff, managers and senior leaders. If your change is about customers or partners, how do they behave? Are people supportive, are they positive about change? Or do you see resistance?

Symbols / Rituals.

Some parts of behaviour and ways of working are so ingrained they become rituals in the workplace. These often go unquestioned, they are just accepted as ways of working. Examples of these include regular departmental meetings always the same duration held on the same day each week. They can be how people communicate, for example predominantly by email or virtual calls or what stories are told within the organisation. What can you see that happens that is repeated without question?

Systems / Processes.

Often, we create systems and processes which over years can become less and less relevant. These can drive behaviour/culture in unintended ways. This can be particularly prevalent in larger organisations that rely heavily on processes and structures. Often these can be a blind spot for leaders, who may want people to behave in one way but be inadvertently driving the opposite through their processes. The common phrase “what gets measured gets done” is true in this case, so it’s important to reflect critically and holistically on the impact of systems and processes in your organisation.

How to use it.

Step 1: Review

First, spend some time answering the above questions about your organisation as it is now. Capture some thoughts about each of the headings and start to describe what you see in your organisation. you can do this alone, or with trusted colleagues. It works well to do this with a mix of people around the organisation who you trust to give you honest feedback, and often an external person to facilitate and challenge can be helpful. Complete the template below based on your initial thoughts

Step: 2: The Future

Now critically reflect on your thoughts so far, through the lens of the change you want to make happen. Ask yourself:

- What might be the unintended consequences of these?
- Will this help to get to the change I want to see?
- In the new world, after the change has happened, would I want to still see this?

Step 3: Make a plan

Finally, as you come across examples where your culture is not aligned with what you are trying to achieve in the future, make a plan of what steps you can take to fix this. This is the hard bit of driving change - taking action! Every contradiction you have identified you need to tackle, as each of these will undermine your change programme in some way. The difference between change programmes that succeed and those that fail is the action taken to make a difference. Make a clear list of steps you need to take and allocate resources to these to make sure they happen.

Step 4: Look in the mirror

Often when people describe culture they are talking about something separate from themselves, an entity in its own right. In reality culture is shaped by all of us, every day, intentionally or not. The final step in the process is to think hard about what you have done today to shape culture, and what you intend to do tomorrow! How will you impact the culture as a leader? What rituals, symbols and behaviours are you demonstrating?

Template.

Behaviours

What behaviour change do you want to see?

How do leaders behave?

Are they positive about change?

Supportive?

Symbols / Rituals

What can you see Routines and rituals?

What can your team see?

How might this influence their behaviour?

Systems / Processes

What systems and processes are used day to day and what behaviour do they drive?

What structures are in place?

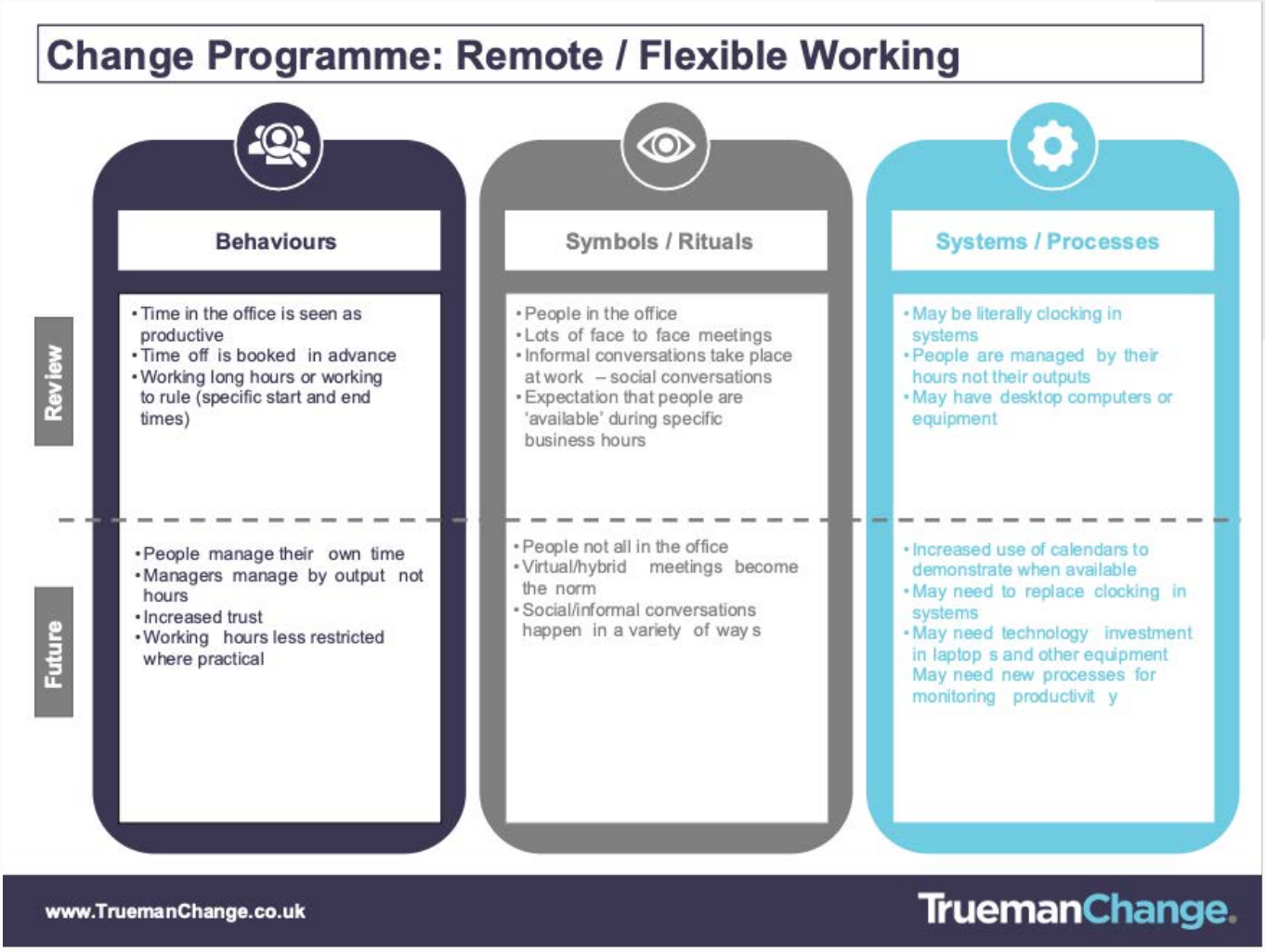
What customer processes are followed?

To help you to see this in action, we've developed 4 scenarios of common types of change, organisations aim for, and suggested what they might like to consider. These are only samples, your template should be completely tailored to your organisation.

Example 1.

Moving to a more flexible/remote working model

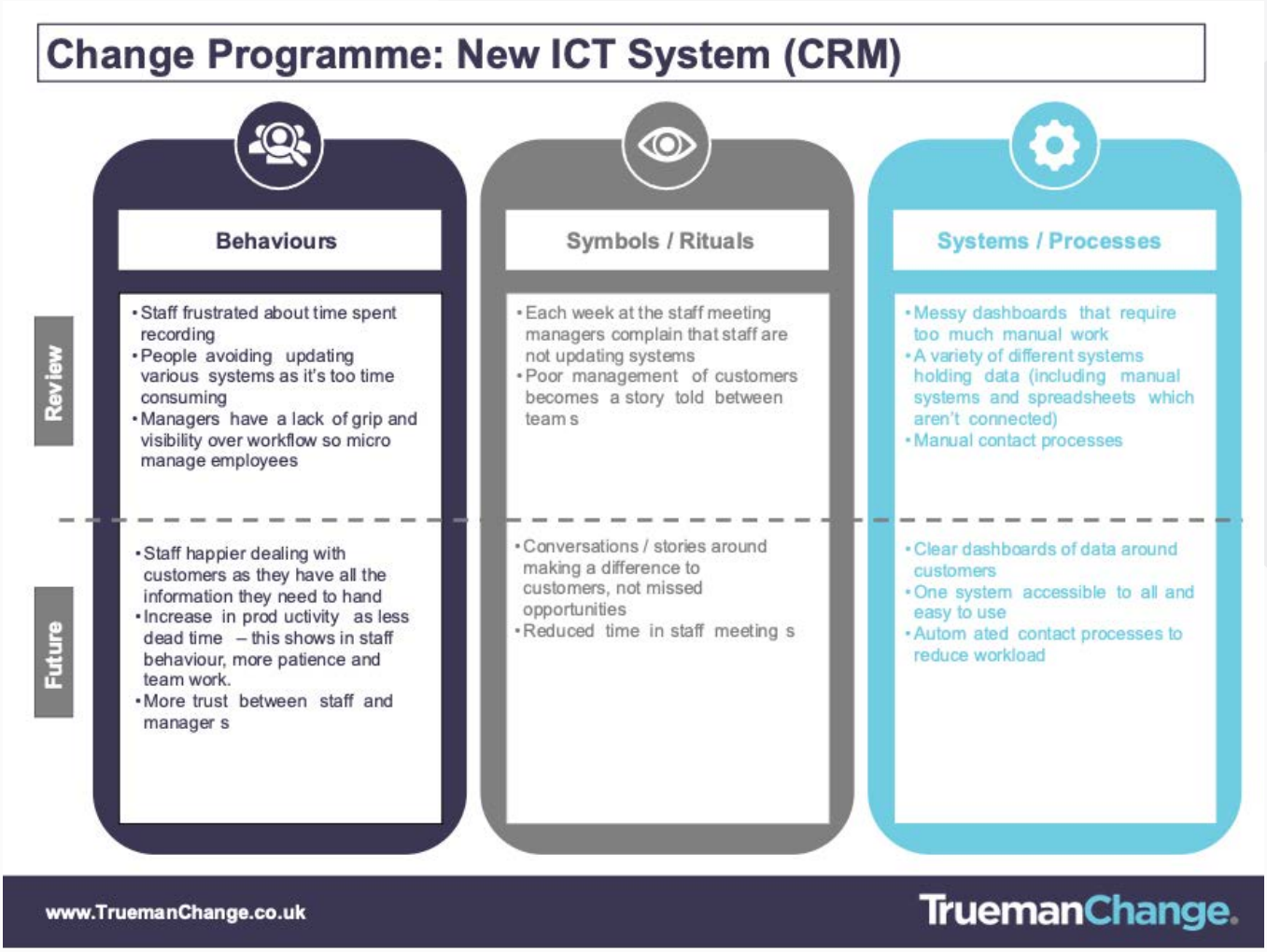
Many organisations are looking to build on their experience and learning from Covid-19 by developing a more flexible or remote working model. For a team/organisation driving this change, they might want to consider:



Example 2.

ICT Driven Change

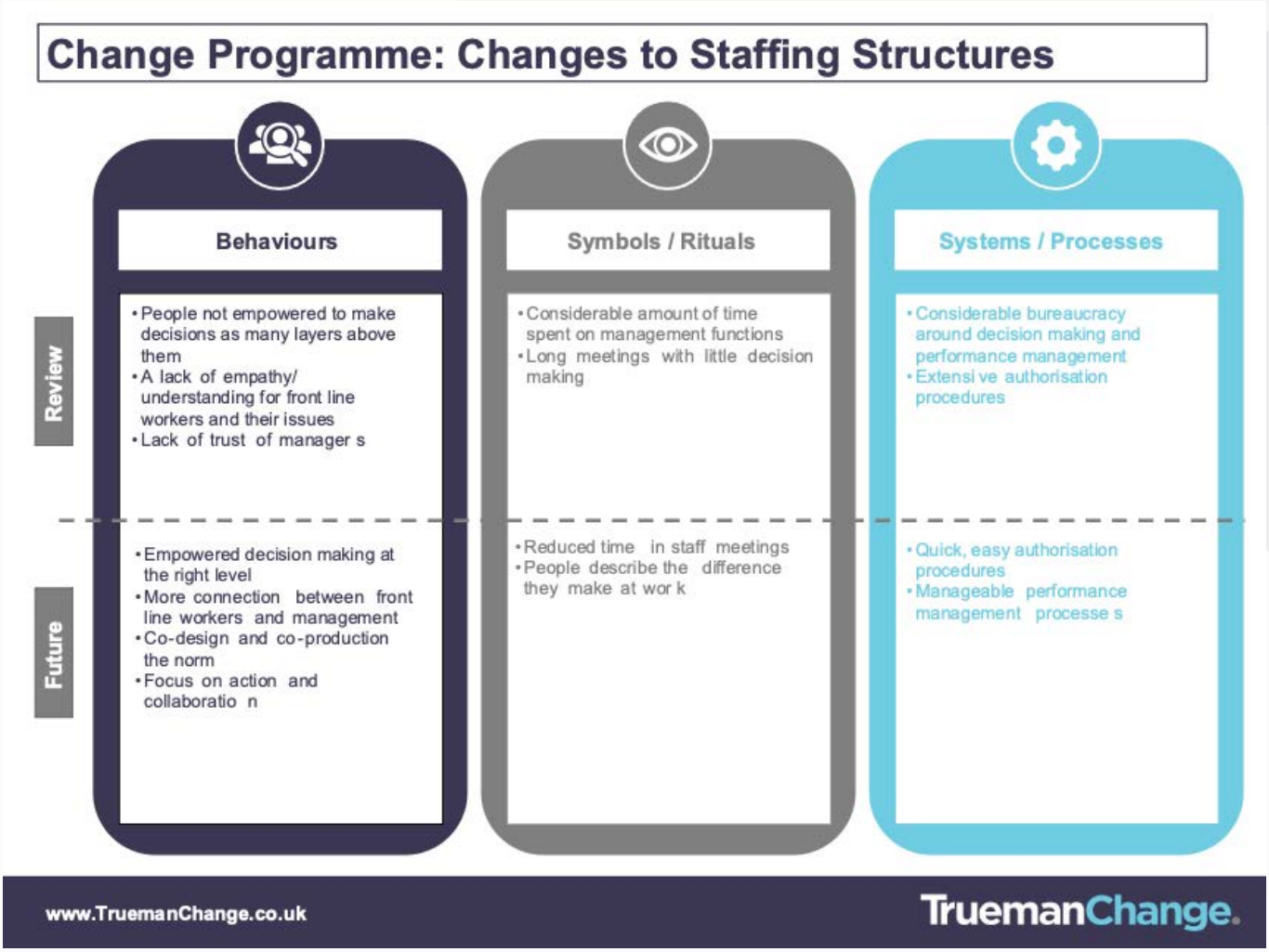
This example is related to an organisation wanting to bring in a new CRM / Database which will save time for staff liaising with customers.



Example 3.

Changes to Staffing Structures

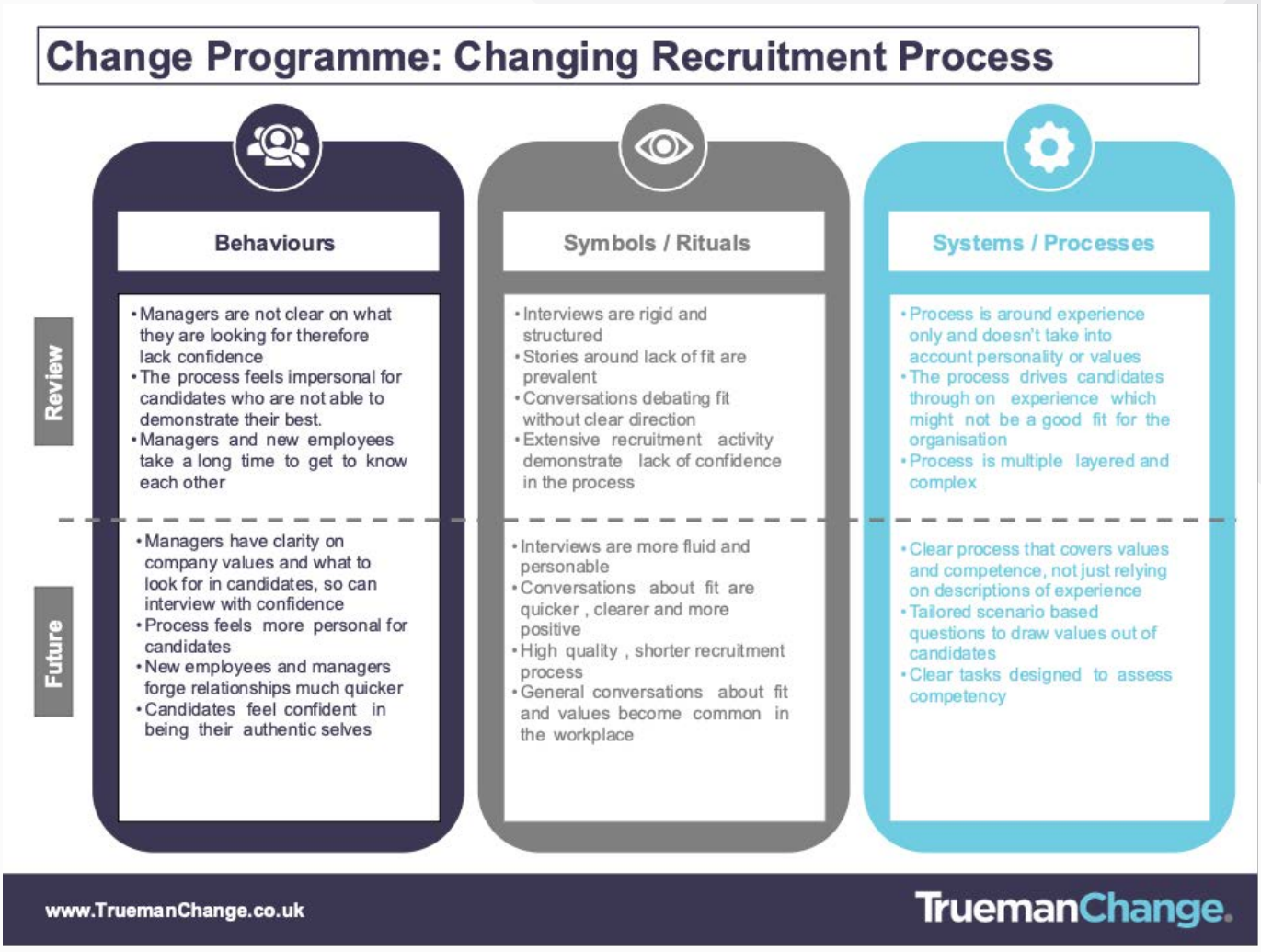
Many large organisations are looking to 'flatten' their structure and have fewer layers of management. Here is a sample template relating to this:



Example 4.

Changes to business model / ways of working

Many organisations are currently completely re-vamping their ways of working. Here is an example of a small business changing from a traditional recruitment process to a values based process.



What Next?

For more information about this tool watch our Youtube video

To see other tools and techniques visit our resources page

For other free downloads visit our downloads page

Read about our case studies of change programmes for inspiration

If you'd like to ask us anything about this tool or change management please contact hello@truemanchange.co.uk.

Ready for change?

Once you have some clarity about your intended change programme, our change diagnostic tool is a great way to assess how ready for change your organisation is! Contact us today for more information about how we can support you.

Want to share your change journey?

We'd love to speak with organisations who are embarking on / in the middle of change journeys. If you'd like to share your story just let us know on the email above and we'll be in touch.

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