Mervyn Dinnen 0:00

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Mervyn Dinnen 1:08

Welcome to today's episode of the HR Means Business podcast, which is part of the HR Happy Hour Network. I'm excited today because my guest is somebody who is a chartered psychologist or author of a best selling book called How to be a changed superhero, host of a very popular HR podcast called HR Uprising. And in 2020 was voted one of the UK's top 10 women in business. Welcome to HR means business. Lucinda Carney.

Lucinda Carney 1:39

Mervyn, thank you very much for having me on I'm delighted to have the boot on the other foot to join you today.

Mervyn Dinnen 1:45

It's a pleasure. I suppose most people know you because of the work you do and the speaking and writing around change. So I suppose my first question would be, what got you interested in change?

Lucinda Carney 1:58

It's interesting because I think something that I'm naturally interested in, honestly, and I one of the theories, one of the things I explore a little bit in the book, is that whether some personalities are more drawn to change than others, and of course, in the context of HR, OD, L and D, because that's my background, was, and I was a learning and development professional in two blue chip businesses, I was often somebody who would become a change agent, and I think it's because I have an interest in I have an interest in future things. I like to buy into things. I was somebody that buys in stuff, but therefore I would often be engaged in change projects where you're trying to take people with you. So I suppose, because I had this, I was always part of organizational development, usually that links very directly to change. So both humanly and as my role, it's something that I buy into, and then it also really interests me, why some people are very cynical about change and what you can do to make it less painful and more successful.

Mervyn Dinnen 2:56

Okay, do you find that the, I suppose the success of the success of change, depends to a certain extent on agility within the business, and probably not, not just the, you know, I mean, across the whole business, so leaders, managers and the people who work there. How do you find this, this kind of works together? Is it something that people really have to be coached through. Is it something that comes naturally to some people?

Lucinda Carney 3:26

I think again, yeah, it does it both yes and yes. So for sure, some people are more bought into change naturally. They naturally. If you think about things, there's the change curve, where people go from denial through to acceptance or exploration. Some people take themselves through that change curve automatically, and obviously it does depend on how attractive they see the future. But in terms of organizational agility and people binding to often, change is not communicated very well. And there's an adage that people, that people don't resist change. They resist change being done to them, and all too often in organizations, people don't understand why the change is necessary. And you think about think, well, let's take COVID as an example. I know we're way beyond, thankfully, hopefully, way beyond it, but people were not using technologies like zoom that we're talking on. You know, it was everyone was really quite resistant to unless you really had to using remote technology and definitely turning your camera on. But along came a pandemic, and suddenly the change was forced on us. We needed to do it because we had to. You could describe that as a bit of a burning platform, but in an organization, all too often, people don't understand the why. And so one of the things I always feel is we have a responsibility to communicate a really compelling why, ideally positive vision as to what the change could bring to us, why it's going to be useful, what's in it for me, but equally, what happens if we don't change? You know, as organizations, we've got to we've got to develop, we've got to grow, we've got to be more productive, which means sometimes we have to alter our behaviors and and take on things. Maybe aren't that attractive. We may prefer the status quo, but if we really think about it and future, pace ourselves. If we don't change, then we may not have a job or a business or otherwise. So it's helping people understand why it's necessary to be agile and challenge the status quo.

Mervyn Dinnen 5:17

Is this something that the hiring process could help with are there certain, I suppose you know, within people you're interviewing, Can you sense people who would be very open to change or or very adaptable to change, and others who might resist it?

Lucinda Carney 5:35

Certainly there are personality traits where people are more comfortable with change than others. So sort of openness to new experience. There are, there are certain traits where people would be more attracted to it. I'm trying to think of it as of a tool that you'd use, like an O, P, Q, or something like that, where you'd look at the dimensions where some are more attracted to it than others. But saying that, as with all kind of personality traits, that doesn't necessarily mean it's a good thing. That could mean somebody's so attracted to change that they're not going to be able to be consistent and follow any kind of routine or process. You know, you could be a bit of a liability if you're always seeking out change. So I think it's more about something, about helping understand how we embrace change and we accept it, or we look for the positives, because actually everybody has to deal with change. I accept that not everyone is going to be a change leader. So if you were recruiting for somebody into an HR role or a change role, then you would be looking for certain traits. And I would say, you want to see people who are comfortable with with complexity or ambiguity. They can make sense of those sort of things. Maybe they're quite future oriented in terms of working things. That they might be someone who's quite flexible. They have a preference for flexible, almost spontaneous in terms of things. They need to be people who are great communicators and good at building relationships. So those are all traits, and personality traits that would make somebody more likely to take others with them, but fundamentally, you wouldn't recruit broadly for for change, because we all have to go along with it. It's more about, I'd say, working out as an organization, how you communicate change in a way that every personality type or preference can get on board with it.

Mervyn Dinnen 7:27

I suspect human resources are quite key in this, and themselves obviously need to be fairly adaptable to change. How does this play out? I suppose we're going to talk about technology in a minute, because obviously a lot of change is driven by things like that. But in terms of human resources, the HR team themselves, culturally, behaviorally, how can they create an environment for change?

Lucinda Carney 7:56

So this is where I do feel that HR can step up, or ideally should step up. And HR being very broad in terms of there's so many differences, there are certainly, if you are in the area of HR, which is OD or L and D, you're probably more in that kind of communication space. And I would say that being able to be a change agent or change champion or a change superhero, as per my book, with your change traits, then I think those are things that you can nurture and develop in yourself. With regard to that, it one of the things, if I take aside the sort of the traits which I'm talking about, standing up and being counted if you're in there, being able to see the strategic link, the communication, the collaboration, the courage to maybe challenge people. Those are things you can develop as a change agent or change superhero. The other aspect that I think, where HR can really help themselves with change is making sure that they are lifting themselves up out of the weeds and being sort of strategic, being leaders, and by leaders, guess it may be positional power leaders, but very often they're not. They are talking to people on the ground. They doesn't matter whether you're the most junior HR person, you are influenced people. You are really a custodian of people culture and people behaviors, and you can be a leader in that way. And to do that, you do need to try not to be too transactional. Where you know the adage about HR getting often, where we don't have time to do things that are strategic is because we're very busy doing the transactional day to day stuff. So I guess carving time out to think about, how can I drive this change forward? How can I work on the future stuff? Because often the transactional stuff is very present. It's doing what we've always done. It's reinforcing the old so making sure there's some space and mindset about how we drive forward for the future. Okay?

Mervyn Dinnen 9:57

And some of it, I guess, is about. Attitude and maybe creating psychological safety. Do you find that, again, this comes naturally, or is this something organizations particularly, maybe the HR and people teams have to really work at it right?

Lucinda Carney 10:15

Psychological safety, for me is, and I'm sure people out there know what we're talking about, but just for the sake of definition, it's an environment where everybody feels safe to learn. It's where people feel that you can make mistakes and and if you think about it, change or growth. And this does lead us on things like technology. You need to feel able to try things out without being criticized or stamped down or told off. You say you need to feel safe to be able to do it. So you start there with people having a sense of belonging in terms of psychological safety. So do I feel I belong? Do I feel there's a four step model which I don't get me created, but certainly it starts with with belonging, and then it's about the if, making sure that your thoughts count. So you feel that those people around you are interested in what you have to say, and then the highest level of psychological safety is I feel able to challenge so I care enough about where this organization is going to be able to challenge the status quo around me. If you're at that level, a really high level of psychological safety, you're going to be a great change agent. But in terms of what does HR and L and D need to do to enable that? To be honest, for me, this is where it goes. We need to ensure that the leaders and managers in our organization are creating those environments. You can't do it on your own as HR, and you can maybe do it with your own team. What matters is making sure that the managers are encouraging people to have ideas. They are saying that's fine. They're coaching people. They're making it safe to make mistakes. They're not criticizing people. So that very much is about the cultural impact that we can have, and we can reinforce positive cultural behaviors, and we can call out negative cultural behaviors, and I see as as custodians of culture, but we have to one of my first C's in the in the book that I wrote, I talk about five C's of being a change superhero is courage, and that might mean, even though I'm Junior, but I can see that the senior leader in my organization who is negatively affecting psychological safety, for example, maybe, you know, humiliating someone who's made a mistake, or Shouting, shouting out of things, or correcting things without letting people grow, making it Oh, It's my way or the highway. So being able to find those opportunities to recognize and reward and reinforce positives and maybe call out appropriately, those where they're not leading by example. So it's really influencing those leaders. So if you're an HR business partner, you can influence that person who's your director that you support, you know, have a quiet word with them. So having that confidence and the courage to challenge appropriately, I think, could be really key in terms of creating psychological safety is an indirect approach.

Mervyn Dinnen 12:53

What are the other C's?

Lucinda Carney 12:56

Okay. So you need to have courage to stand up and be counted in terms of terms my second D is connect with strategy. So in order for people to understand change, they need to know why. So we've all heard about the sort of burning platform idea. So you know, you will, you'll jump away from something negative or you want to go towards something positive. And often people don't understand why. What's in it, for me, in terms of the change and why it's so important for the business strategy. So, you know, we need to do this because if we don't X, Y Z, or if we do x, y z, so making sure it's communicated, which is also the fourth C, the communication, so connecting with strategy, corroboration, is my third C, which is a bit of a you have to come up with words that fit with C's, you see, but that is, it's making sure that you've got facts or evidence. So it might be, you know, this is what happened the company down the road that took on this agile or using a case study as to why we should move to this version of AI. So corroboration is saying it's not just my opinion. Do it this way. It's actually this is why it works. So it's about influencing people, helping people to convince that you're not just made it up. And then the final two c's are communication. So being a great communicator, part of that is adapting your communication style to the needs of the people that you're talking to. And that could be personality. So right at the start, we talked about personality. So some people love change, some people don't. How do you adapt to those preferences and convince them in language that they understand and finally, collaborate. You can't change on your own. One person cannot make a change. Change is where all of us are getting in the same direction. So working with others and finding using the we how do we get there, is the key. It's not, it's not a solo endeavor.

Mervyn Dinnen 14:45

It's how that's communicated, obviously across the business. And I suppose people you know have to, have to almost like be it, to encourage it.

Lucinda Carney 14:54

They have very much who you are, almost. And so those. So natural changing, it would be doing those things naturally, right? But they are behaviors that we can learn and we can model and reinforce in others.

Mervyn Dinnen 15:08

Now, technology is obviously one of the areas that has led, well certainly over the last 1520, years generally, to so much change in how, when, where we do business, work and things like that. And this is accelerating, as we can tell, as new things. I mean, AI seems to be the thing we're all talking about. But I posted something the other day that I was I was sorting out some old magazines, business magazines, when I didn't have a subscription to things like Harvard Business Review, and used to buy them occasionally to read on my way to conferences and stuff. And in 2018 or 2019 I can't remember, one of the issues the front page was the AI powered organization. And I did a double take. So I thought, maybe this is something I picked up last week or something. But, no, no, it was six years old or more. So I mean, some of these things suddenly seem to suddenly become this. But, you know, we've been talking about them for some time. So tech, whilst it falls it brings change, or can seem to bring change quite quickly. It also is bubbling away for quite a bit of time. So what, I suppose, what is the relationship with technology, rather than speaking about AI specifically at the moment, I'll come to that in a minute. But technology itself, how is this, I suppose, within the framework of change? Because sometimes we don't know what the next technology change is going to be.

Lucinda Carney 16:37

Yeah, I mean, how to go at that question? So we'll come maybe to the AI one later, because I think there's a whole thing. Whole thing where it swings. That's, it's about where things become normalized or accessible to more people, and you become more aware of it, and it's, and then suddenly people find uses for it. And it's, there's lots of noise about it, but maybe that's also look at it from a point of view of HR as a change agent in an organization. Quite often we're involved in technology implementations of change, so roll out of systems. Because if you even now, I mean this, this quote has been out there for 20 odd years, but I still see it reinforced. I was looking at that something like 70% of technology changes are not seen as successful. They don't reap the benefits that were anticipated, which should be about productivity, etc. And the reason is because of people related issues. And so what I think often is we just see technology and people as entirely separate, and kind of forgetting that you can roll out so you can roll out SAP or whatever it is, but it doesn't mean that the people are going to use it, and so you have to take people with you, psychologically and and again, the things we've talked about already are relevant there, but one of the models that I always find really useful is Cotters, eight step model to change. And don't ask me to go through every single step that off the top of my head. I've not got it in front of me. And do write about in the book. It's very well known, but whenever I used to train on it, there were certain areas where it would break down. And so, you know, because, and one of the things is that big system or technology change, often it's decided in an organization in a sort of ivory tower, and the first people, the first thing everyone else knows, is when it gets implemented, and they go, this is coming. And so they feel the change is done to them. So they don't have that. Why we don't know some, why I need to do it so instantly you're getting a level of resistance. So often things break down there. The other thing that sometimes happens is the people who are involved in thinking about this change, they say it's the IT department have decided you're going to move to Oracle, or whatever, any one of them, right? So a big procurement exercise has taken place totally in isolation from the rest of the organization, and it's only when you come to roll it out, you realize that you haven't thought how your expenses system is going to work, or something is entirely compatible, just like done and not thought through properly, so that can break down change. And then the final area with technology change, which I think is fascinating, where businesses, I don't think get the value out of it. I move my hands around here because I map onto Cotter, the model, the Lewin model, which is unfreezing, make change, then refreeze the organization. Is that quite often companies go, oh, great, okay, we've rolled the system out. It's done. The fact that no one's using it, nothing happens. So so they don't take the people bit. They don't keep on pushing to get people to not just log into the new system to do their expenses, to the new system, to do their appraisals on the new system, to use it for talent management. So you don't get these built on benefits, which then people go, Oh, I actually see why this pain had a purpose. And so they don't bother doing it until they really have to, and the people slip back into the old ways. So for me, if you were using technology, a model, especially in a large organizational area, thinking about the cotton model is really quite a useful way of of doing that, because there are these steps that go through, and there's loads that there's certain places where it seems to break down. It's where it's not communicated well, and that's where the quick wins aren't embedded, and people don't get to feel the benefit of it, so they just go back to the old way. And of course, hey, those benefits, the reason they're rolling it out, there were productivity benefits, but they only kick in if 80% of the organization's actually using it. So that's my link on traditional technology, if you like, yeah, yeah. And that one, I think so. It's interesting. I did a survey on HR professionals and AI, and we had about 100 odd people just respond in terms of it. And there was a typical, sort of, you know, the normal distribution of loads of people that most all they've done was a bit of chat GPT, and lots of people really, quite resistant, really, quite cynical about it. And it's, I think, something like AI, what really makes a difference is people understand. Well, in fact, if I even think our own business, at the start of last year, we started doing some people didn't really know what it was. It was a scary word, actually. And then you go, Oh, chat, GPT, that's kind of what, that's the extent of what anyone's done anywhere. And then you realize that it's in lots of places. Do you talk, you know, recruitment, certain places where it can bring lots of benefits. But also there were lots of negative associated with AI two or three years ago in terms of, you know, the quality of the data, you know, the biases embed. So there's loads of things that have kind of got flushed out. But where I think something like AI is it comes to it's word of mouth is, oh, I find it really useful for this. And so that is almost mini change agents. It's sharing, oh, I found it really helpful. Is, have you tried this tool? And people start to experiment. But for them to get to that point, they've had to probably, if you go through the change curve, they've got beyond denial and resistance. And those earlier people are in a bit of exploration. And then if they've explored it and found it beneficial, they talk about it, and it's sort of naturally starting to bring people along with it. So that feels more organic, I suppose. Then we talked earlier about the sort of the zoom, the technology thing that now I find it very hard to function without us having things like this. That was forced. But it also has been organic, in terms of the technologies that that we use.

Mervyn Dinnen 22:14

What, I suppose, thinking, you know, from all your research, what are the main areas in which you see, I suppose business leaders and managers possibly, you know, don't really help facilitate this. Are they maybe a little bit away from it? Do they see it as HR responsibility? They they have maybe decided on something which has bought this change or has brought the the need to change, but they maybe don't seem to have a stake or agency in how it is rolled out within the organization.

Lucinda Carney 22:48

Certainly, I've seen examples where leaders in an organization say one thing and do another. I mean, we've gotten to remember that our actions speak more loudly than our words, and so, yeah, I think leaders, they can, they can set the way, but they've also they can set the vision. They need to role model. They need to create a psychologically safe culture, which we've talked about already. They need to be open to the fact that some people might struggle with the change, or otherwise, they need to be realistic about timelines for change and make sure that things have been properly thought through in terms of the implications. So and they need to think about the culture that a change has and the impact on people. There's definitely a thing where people have change fatigue, and the more change that people perceive that has taken on, particularly if it hasn't worked, right? So the example I was talking about earlier, where I've seen loads of change organizations that I've worked for, large blue chips, change is always coming along. Really, you'd go, probably 30% of the changes didn't get properly embedded. I think that's probably about right, or you didn't get the benefits you were supposed to. And then before you know it, another change comes along. There's a diagram that I don't show in the book, which I think about the NHS. I mean, change is always being done to the NHS. And if you think actually change is supposed to create an improvement in productivity, Well, only if you pull it through that curve to the point where the improvement takes place. If you whack another change in when you're only a third of the way up the improvement mountain, you're taking them down to a lower level of productivity. I mean, working with an NHS organization right now, they're trying to drive something through, all of the sudden there's a redundancy program with the people driving it through. Well, of course, everything's going to freeze, and it's going to set back everything at least six months. So that investment that they've made in that technology, how are they going to get the rewards to it? Now, that is, I understand all of these things are about money, etc, etc, but really thinking through the impact of layering a change upon change, that's something that leaders need to be mindful of, because it can absolutely be counterproductive. So there's quite a few things there, but it's having that bigger picture thought about, are we going to. To if we're going to go ahead with this change, how do we really make it work? Let's make we fully let's make sure we fully resource it. Let's make sure that we are going to stay with it, because that's the other thing. Change doesn't take six months in a large organization. It's probably a three year program. So are we going to commit to allowing it to take place? That's like going back to NHS. They need 20 years for something to bed in. You can't change it every four years when a new government comes in. So if we're going to go to the effort of doing the change with all of the knock on effects on people emotionally and remember, people are tired of change, and not just in their own work. There's every you know, we've been through five years of non stop change, haven't we? So there's a question, there's fatigue out there, and that makes people cynical. So I think just being really thoughtful about what changes are necessary, and doing them well. And therefore, if you're if you're a leader, work with your HR team, and if you're HR, work with your leaders, and be thoughtful, mindful about doing change really well. Then in your organization, you can point at that exam go and when we did that, and look, we rolled it out, and those are the benefits. And then you've got a model of good change to follow up on, as opposed to something that's been a bit of a fizzle.

Mervyn Dinnen 26:15

People don't like change being done to them, but they don't mind being part of it, if they understand, I suppose, how it will benefit them.

Lucinda Carney 26:22

Yes, and leading the way Absolutely, even if they don't really love it. Do you know what I mean, even if, if they see why it's necessary, you know, if they go? I mean, I'm sad that we've got to lose 20% of people, but I can see the alternative is that the whole business is going to go and, you know, people can take on negative news if they understand why, and they're treated like adults and they're involved in it.

Mervyn Dinnen 26:44

Listen. It's been fabulous being able to speak to you about this and learn, obviously, for me, more about change, but hopefully quite a few of our listeners would have learned something too. How can people connect with you if they want to know a bit more about your research and stuff?

Lucinda Carney 27:00

Yeah, certainly connect with me on LinkedIn. That's the easiest way. So Lucinda Karen, quite straightforward. I don't think there's that too many Lucinda Karen is on LinkedIn. The business I run is actus. You can also find that on LinkedIn if you follow either of those. Then also in terms of the content, I do do a regular webinars. We've got lots and lots of free resources on change. So if people want more sort of information. There's lots that you can access there.

Mervyn Dinnen 27:24

Okay, Lucinda, it's been absolute pleasure. Thank you for joining me today.

Lucinda Carney 27:29

Thank you, Mervyn, thanks for having me.

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