

## Expert Interview Series

Topic: Change Management

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### [The Importance of Change Management: Interview with Mary Gregory](#)



If you speak with any seasoned data quality practitioner they will cite change management as one of the critical factors in ensuring long-term data quality success.

In this interview industry expert Mary Gregory provides practical advice for anyone looking to improve the success rate of their data quality projects through effective change management.

### The Importance of Change Management: Interview with Mary Gregory

Data Quality Pro: Can you describe your background Mary and explain how you became involved with change management?

Mary Gregory: My background has always been in enabling people and supporting change. I had an early career in psychiatry before becoming a training manager for First Choice holidays where I helped implement leadership and management, innovative service improvement and quality initiatives.

In 1993 I became an independent consultant, leading and managing the training and facilitation of some major change programmes in organisations such as the Benefits Agency, BAA and Tesco.

On completing my NLP Business Practitioner training and an MSc in Change my focus essentially shifted from one of training to being more a Change Agent.

My experience is mainly about helping organisations develop strong, cohesive leadership teams to deliver business growth by creating a culture of engagement and high performance. I work mostly in large complex service organisations in both the private and public sectors, including Polo Ralph Lauren, HBOS, First National Bank, Omgeo, Tesco, T Mobile, MTV, The Economist, Westminster Council.

Data Quality Pro: What are the typical type of change initiatives you are involved in.

Mary Gregory: I typically consult in the following initiatives:

- Turning around business performance
- Restructuring of departments and business processes
- Engaging and mobilising the workforce in the fulfilment of the vision
- Working with executive team to co-create a vision and strategy and aligning to ensure this is implemented
- Developing a performance culture
- Managing resistance
- Overcoming silo thinking
- Conflict resolution
- Building leadership capabilities

Data Quality Pro: One of the common issues cited in our profession is where data quality initiatives appear to be successful but over time the improvements are lost and workers slip back into their old habits. How can we make change stick?

Mary Gregory: The challenge of every change project is making it stick.

What many change initiatives miss is the understanding and appreciation of who we are as human beings and how this impacts the change process. So often I have experienced quite grandiose plans, expensive development of IT and systems, only for the one element which is crucial to ensuring this change takes place almost remaining a mystery and that is the engagement and motivation of people.

Culture is that almost invisible force that not only impacts the attitude and affect of an organisation's workforce, but also pulls them relentlessly back into old ways of thinking, doing and being, like being caught in an unseen current that drags you back downstream. People may initially be completely fired up and fully motivated seemingly bought into new

ways of working, but as soon as something goes wrong that spark quickly disappears as they are re-immersed in the organisations culture. What occurs then in most instances is unconscious reactive behaviour which then perpetuates the re-immersion in the culture and a grip of the cultural pattern can seem almost impossible to shift.

The access to transform this and create change more likely to stick is to:

1. Recognise the human mindset and accept that there will be a pull towards the cultural status quo.
2. Create and champion a vision that is really compelling and is a burning platform that calls people into action. Ensure this is communicated powerfully, talked about with visible actions taking place that demonstrate movement towards fulfilling the vision (as opposed to being pinned to the wall and forgotten).
3. Develop a leadership team who can be counted on more often than not to keep focusing on and creating the future. This must be started at the top with the executive team and transmitted throughout the organisation. Everyone within the organisation has the capacity to be a leader and real leaders are those who bring out the leadership in others. The cultivation of this type of approach is the most positive one I have experienced in enabling change to stick.
4. Don't allow breakdowns to be dramatised into major crises. When breakdowns occur, which is all part of the process of change, keep re-focusing on the future vision and ensure the action taken is movement towards rather than back into old behaviour and cultural norms.
5. Engage stakeholders early on, the more involved people are towards development of the change, the more likely they are to commit to it and support action that will fulfil it.

Consultant and coaching support are vital to create a culture change that sticks. This is because those who already work within the organisation are most commonly blind to how they are caught up in the organisations culture, whereas professional who offer outside support can ensure they keep a clearer and more objective view of the breakdowns and challenges when they occur.

Data Quality Pro: If an organisation can't find a sponsor or senior backer for their change initiative is it best to suspend completely or are there any "guerilla tactics" you can recommend?

Mary Gregory: In my experience no matter how flat an organisations' structure, for change to really occur, it has to be sponsored by someone at the top, in fact sponsored seems too soft a word. Any senior person has to be completely committed to the change happening as if their life depended on it. That's why having a vision which creates a burning platform – i.e. creates the necessary urgency and momentum, is so fundamental to the change actually happening.

I believe that the most effective way to engage and communicate with people is to be straight, honest and authentic.

Guerilla tactics as such smack of “game playing” which risk people experiencing being manipulated, and hugely affects levels of trust, thus impacting the buy in and ownership people have towards the change. Trust is key to change happening and those organisations who are seen as great places to work and can enable change effectively are those that also have the greatest levels of trust.

Data Quality Pro: It obviously sounds like we need more change agents in our profession so what do you feel are the skills and traits of a change agent?

Mary Gregory: Someone who is able to:

- Hold the picture of the future, whilst dealing with the emerging process and hold the ambiguity that is often present during the implementation of any change
- Understand the organisational, team and individual behaviour
- Listen exceptionally well and tune into being aware of possible patterns of resistance that could sabotage the change
- Communicate easily and where necessary offer ongoing motivation and support to all levels of the organisation

## Key Points Raised:

1. Engagement and motivation of people is crucial to making change stick
2. Recognise the human mindset and accept that there will be a pull towards the cultural status quo
3. Create and champion a vision that is really compelling and is a burning platform that calls people into action
4. Develop a leadership team who can be counted on more often than not to keep focusing on and creating the future
5. Everyone within the organisation has the capacity to be a leader
6. Real leaders are those who bring out the leadership in others
7. Cultivation of this type of leadership is critical when enabling change to stick
8. Breakdowns and setbacks will occur, this is all part of the process of change
9. Keep re-focusing on the future vision and ensure progressive action is taken
10. Engage stakeholders early on, involved stakeholders are more likely to commit to change and support actions that will fulfil it
11. Consultant and coaching support are vital to create a culture change that sticks
12. People who already work within the organisation are most commonly blind to how they are caught up in the organisations culture
13. External professionals ensure a clearer and more objective view of breakdowns and challenges when they occur
14. For change to really occur, it has to be sponsored by someone at the top
15. Any senior person has to be completely committed to the change happening as if their life depended on it
16. A vision which creates a burning platform (providing urgency and momentum) is fundamental to change actually happening

17. The most effective way to engage and communicate with people is to be straight, honest and authentic
18. Trust is key to change happening
19. Those organisations who are seen as great places to work and can enable change effectively are those that also have the greatest levels of trust
20. A change agent must be able to create a strong vision for the future, cope with ambiguity, understand organisational behaviour, listen intently for signs of sabotage and communicate freely

## Further Reading

[Are you managing change in your data quality initiative?](#)

[Introduction to Guerilla Data Governance: An interview with Mike Meier](#)

[How to create a data quality competency center: Expert interview with John Schmidt](#)

[Creating An Internal Data Quality Community: Introduction \(Part 1 of 4\)](#)

[Creating An Internal Data Quality Community: The Benefits \(Part 2 of 4\)](#)

[Creating a Data Quality Community: The Launch \(Part 3 of 4\)](#)

[Struggling to sustain improvements in your data quality programs? 10 recommendations for organisational success](#)

[Are you sustaining change in your data quality initiatives? Lessons from leading change management specialists.](#)

## About Mary Gregory



Mary Gregory (website: <http://www.playinghamlet.com>) helps organisations develop strong, cohesive leadership teams to deliver business growth by creating a culture of engagement and high performance. With a successful track record in learning, development and change management, Mary takes a pragmatic approach underpinned by her knowledge and understanding of both individual and organisational behaviours. She works mostly in large complex service organisations in both the private and public sectors, with particular experience in retail, finance, travel and leisure and media.

Core competencies: Application of all stages of the learning cycle, leadership development, team alignment, strategy implementation, culture change, dealing with conflict, silo thinking and fear of change.

Mary has worked for the last 15 years as an independent consultant and interim with blue chip clients such as Polo Ralph Lauren, Tesco, BAA , MTV, T Mobile, The Economist, HBOS, First National Bank. This followed a career heading up learning and development with TUI AG (First Choice Holidays, 1989 – 1994) Head of Hotel Services, Trafalgar Tours (1988 – 89), and TUI AG (Thomson Holidays 1986 – 88). Prior to this she worked in child and family psychiatry. Mary has the CIPD Certificate in Training, a Post Graduate Diploma in Change Agent Skills and Strategies, University of Surrey, is a qualified coach and coach supervisor and is a licensed facilitator of the Executive Team Alignment Process (Executap ©).

Visit Mary's Website: <http://www.playinghamlet.com>