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# Reconciling the carrot and the stick: people engagement and benefits tracking in complex projects

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# About me

- Leader of planned change since the mid 1980s initially in chemicals, nuclear pharmaceuticals and nuclear industrial products.
- Consultant for 20 years 'mid career' working cross sectors and with a particular specialism focused on uncertainty, risk and change – with some notable risk culture change programmes in mining and IT.
- Doctoral research into organisational change from the perspective of the recipients of change rather than another change-agent centric view.
- Joined ABP as Director of Change Portfolio at Associated British Ports in 2015 to lead an ambitious portfolio of change intended to change every process, system and way of working for 2000 staff in three years.
- Now part-time at ABP (leading Portfolio Governance and Group Head of Risk) and part-time back in the world of consulting.
- Editor of APM BoK7.

## In this session

### Reconciling the carrot and the stick: people engagement and benefits tracking in complex projects

Both essential and, on the face of it, independent project management practices

Neither is intended to be a form of reward or punishment to motivate behaviour

Explore how in practice they have become intertwined in ABP with some unintended consequences

Share some reflections and potential learning for others



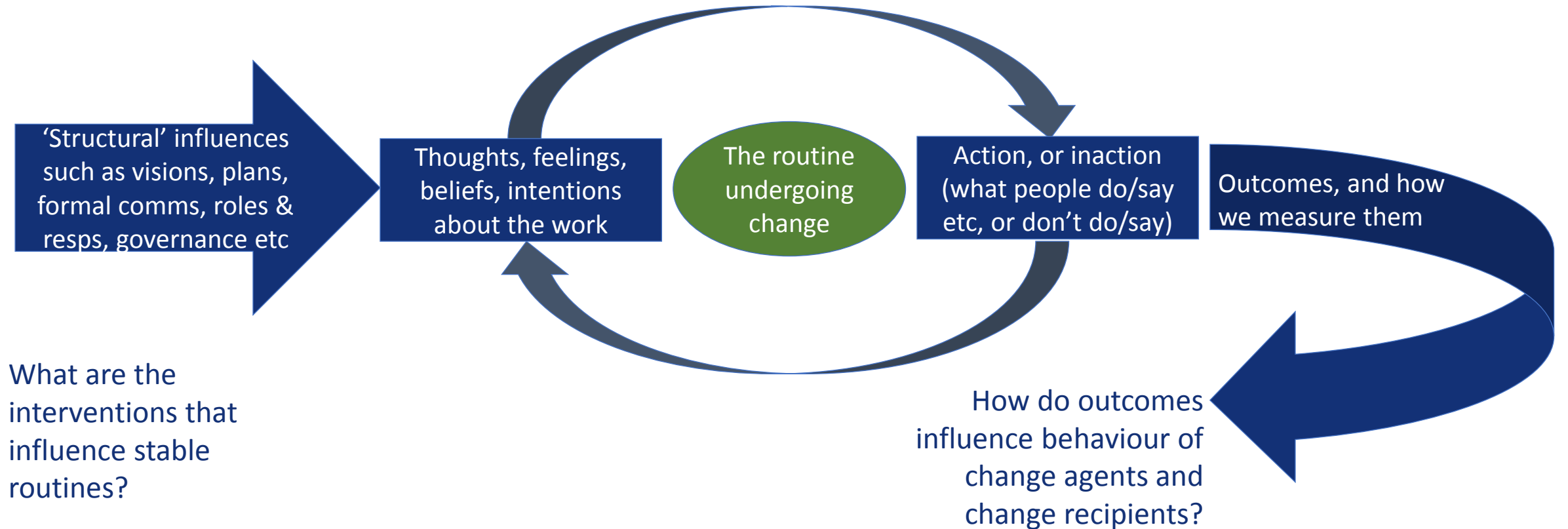
**Potentiality UK: unlocking the potential performance from uncertainty and change**

# Benefit management across the portfolio

- Portfolio of programmes and projects designed to achieve a step-change in performance across all six strategic pillars in three years.
- Set of KPIs that span the pillars and a 'measurement' culture.
- Contribution to improved performance attributed to each project with rigorous benefit tracking.
- In many ways a 'text-book' answer to identifying, attributing, tracking and measuring benefit.



# Thinking about change from the perspective of the work to be changed



*Adapted from Murray-Webster, 2014: internal dynamics of organisational routines undergoing planned change*



# Beyond the 'usual' plans, governance and formal 'comms'

- **Monthly senior leader conversations:**

- Share plans and progress
- Agree priorities
- Debate issues.

*Designed to be a 'messy' conversation, not formal governance.*

- **Monthly business unit/function conversations:**

- Portfolio updates – aligning the change 'drum-beat' with the business
- Identify issues
- Work on solutions.

*An opportunity to connect the 'top 100' leaders with current plans.*

- **Monthly team conversations:**

- All teams, facilitated, strategic pillar theme, focused on desired benefits and their fears, issues, risks of their choosing.
- Single purpose of enabling conversation – access thoughts and feelings
- Leading to local action.

*An opportunity to engage everyone authentically.*

But we have found...

### **Although the measures are important:**

- To justify funding through formal business case
- To track and communicate progress
- To show the balance between financial and non-financial measures
- To trigger conversations
- **Yet benefit measures feel like a ‘stick’ to some across the business** with concern about the direct attribution of benefit to particular project or programme rather than to the portfolio overall.
- Heads of business units are happy to sign up to results, but want to have as much flexibility as possible to deliver those results.



And we have found...

## **Conversations about outcomes are really important:**

- To make it personal (to individuals and teams)
  - To keep it honest (yes - we will need fewer people in the future state but we are focused on everyone 'winning' in their situation as far as possible)
  - To help people be part of the change solution – active participants not passive recipients.
- **Yet people started to feel like engagement was a 'carrot', i.e. an inducement** and somehow the sincerity of the efforts of the change team were tainted by perceptions that all that mattered to anyone were the benefits.

## Closing thoughts

- All change succeeds and all change fails – for someone who matters?
- To make more of the people happier more of the time requires a way of getting at what matters to as many individuals as possible
- Takes time – takes true ‘engagement’ beyond formulaic/propaganda based communications
- Formal measurement systems are an essential way of starting and continuing conversations – balancing the organisation view of success with the views of those whose ways of working need to change if the whole is to succeed
- But in the end, over-zealous benefit tracking can have unintended consequences and can start to unravel all the ‘good stuff’
- When you think you’re doing it all right – you’re probably not!

**Thank you for listening**