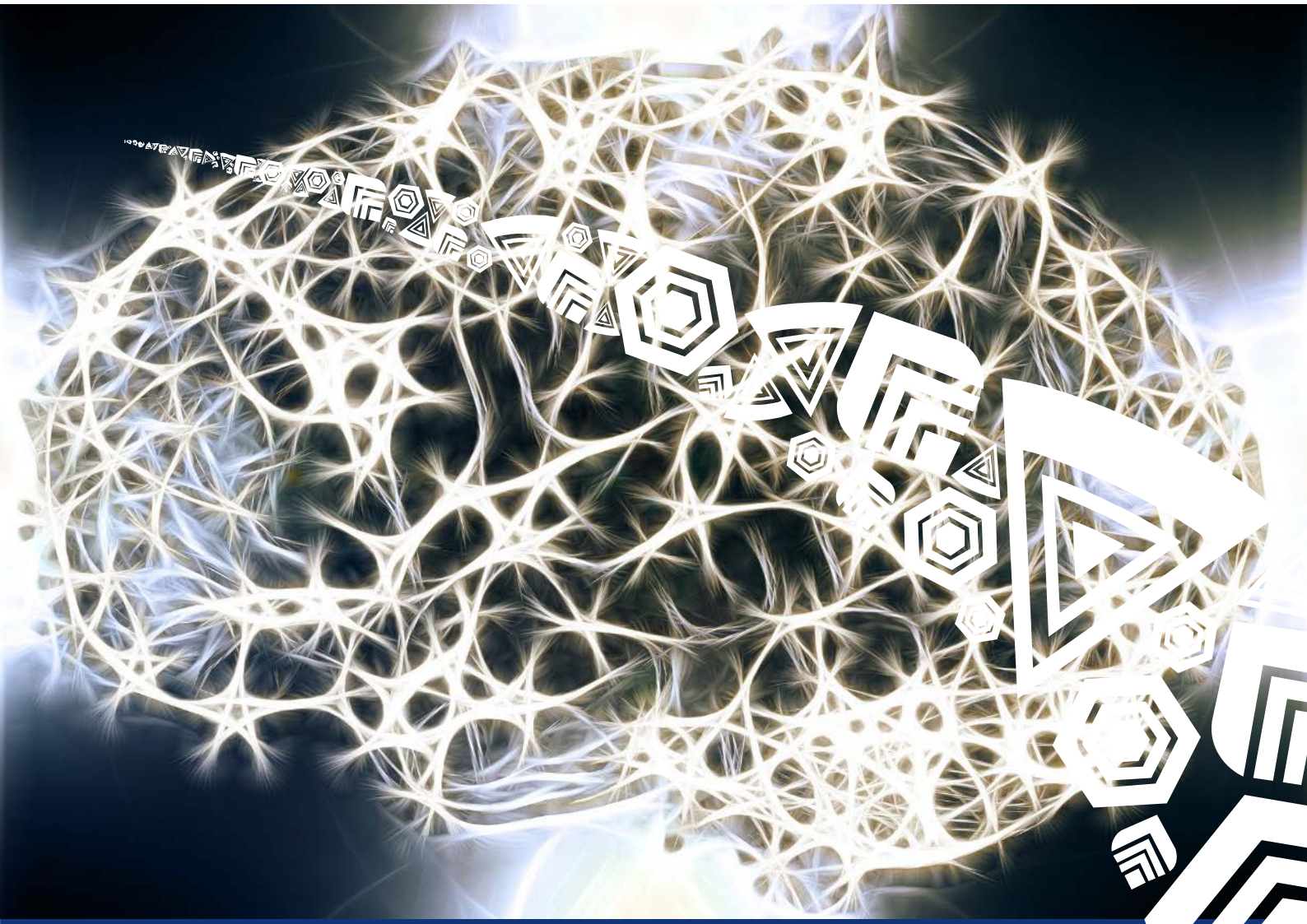
ChangeQuest

Tackling the pace
of change



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February 2018

Successful change
in a fast-paced world

If the pace of change sometimes feels overwhelming, here's pause for thought:

"The pace of change has never been this fast … and yet, it will never be this slow again."

So said Canadian premier Justin Trudeau at the recent Davos Economic Forum. Just think about that for a moment …

Daunting, isn't it?

This paper covers three areas:

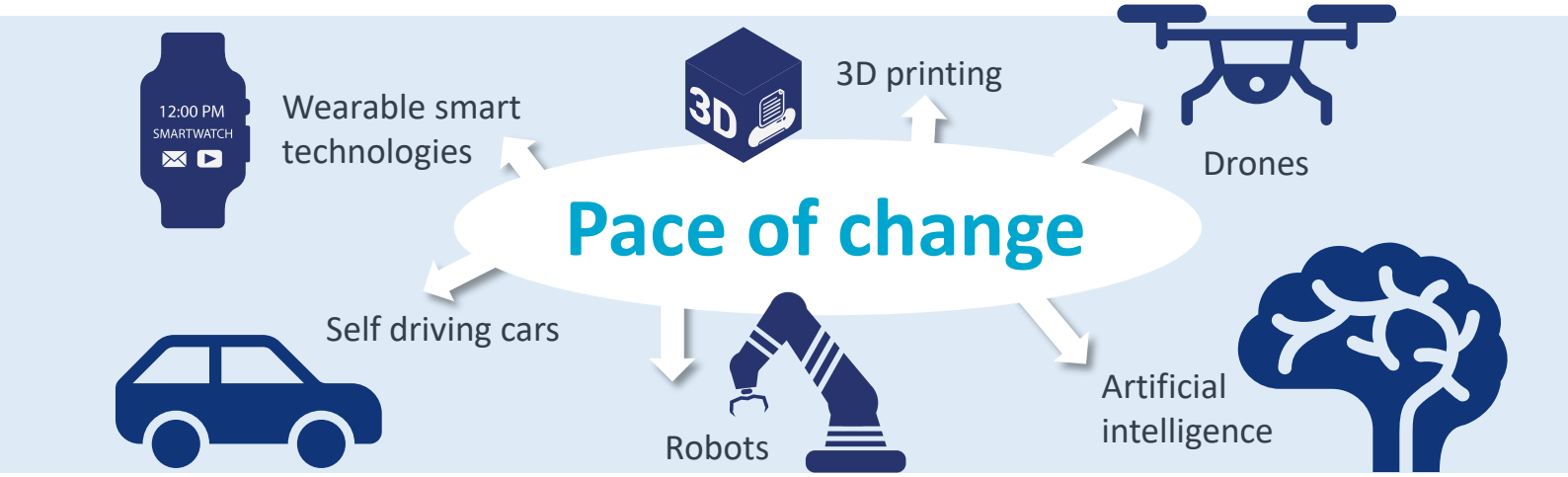
1. How the pace of change is increasing

2. How we can best prepare for it – in particular, attitudes and mindset around change

3. Practical ideas to help you support people through change in the future

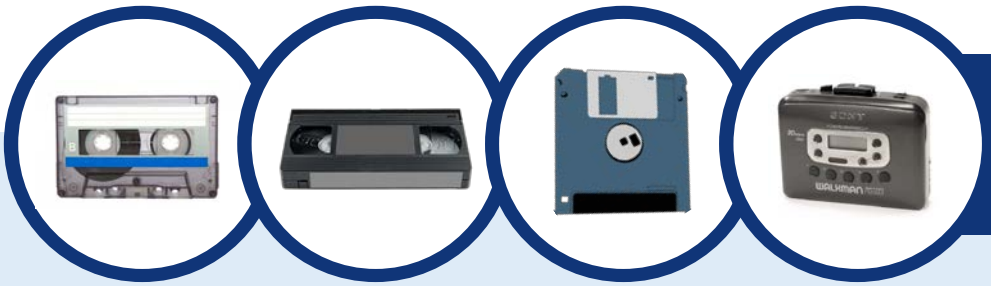
1. Our fast, fast world

We are actually getting very good at adapting to change. Whereas it took 50 years from the launch of electricity for one in four people to be using it, the internet swept through 25% of the world in just seven years.



There are expected to be 10 million self-driving cars on the roads within the next three years. And we are more and more comfortable with automation for example at using self check-in (or self checkouts) in airports, hotels, supermarkets and petrol stations.

New smarter, faster technologies are being developed quicker – and they are being adopted much quicker.



Did you ever own one of these?

If you still have some dusty VHS video tapes lying around the house, imagine how one day (not too far off) we will be nostalgically looking back at pictures of the smartphones we use today, or the Hoover that we push around manually.

The world is changing faster than any time in human history!

How to prepare for transformation

McKinsey summarised, in a key takeaway from Davos 2018, that we need to fasten our seatbelts and get ready for an even more intense wave of corporate transformation.

They based this finding on conversations with large, well-performing corporates from telecom to pharma, banking to energy. Across every sector, the message was the same: the radical restructuring of portfolios companies have seen to date is just a prologue – they are only getting started.

And a ripple effect spreads the impact far and wide. A McKinsey survey found that in 75% of cases, change has an impact across multiple business functions.

The organisations I work with feel they are operating in a constant state of flux – and this has crept up on companies in just the last few years.

They are keen to be prepared for change, and they start to deploy many methods and approaches – mapping Lean, with Continuous Improvement overlaying that on Agile. We can add to the mix other organisational change models such as Kotter, Bridges, and ADKAR. It is of course very important to have up to date knowledge and skills of best practice change management approaches and build a rich tool kit. Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet, and it is not a case of doing more of the same thing, only *bigger, better, faster, more efficient.*

Emergent **Top-down** Bottom-up

Continuous Improvement

Traditional Project Management

Agile Project Management Lean

Above all, it comes down to **PEOPLE**.

Ultimately it's people who will make change happen – or scupper it!

2. Preparing people for change

Just as you would not send your people up a mountain without preparation, so you need to equip them for change.

Some will welcome change enthusiastically (they are the ones you see waving their arms in glee at Alton Towers as the rollercoaster plunges around another vertiginous bend). Some resist even a small divergence from their routine.

But we all experience change in our lives – school, work, friends, changing jobs, taking opportunities. We embrace life-changing events, getting married, moving house, having children. Some people create change simply to make life more interesting – a different route to work, moving furniture around "just for a change".

Even those who are more reluctant to shake things up still do it. They would not be functioning in the world if they didn't adapt – seasons change, weather changes and our environment changes.

By helping people develop a change mindset you can get everyone on board. A change mindset is a **"growth mindset".** It's about being resilient, learning and growing – our core ethos at ChangeQuest – and keeping an open mind to possibilities. It's about future-proofing ourselves and our organisations.

Reprogramming mindsets

The Growth Mindset is a concept devised by Carol Dweck, Professor of Psychology at Stanford University:

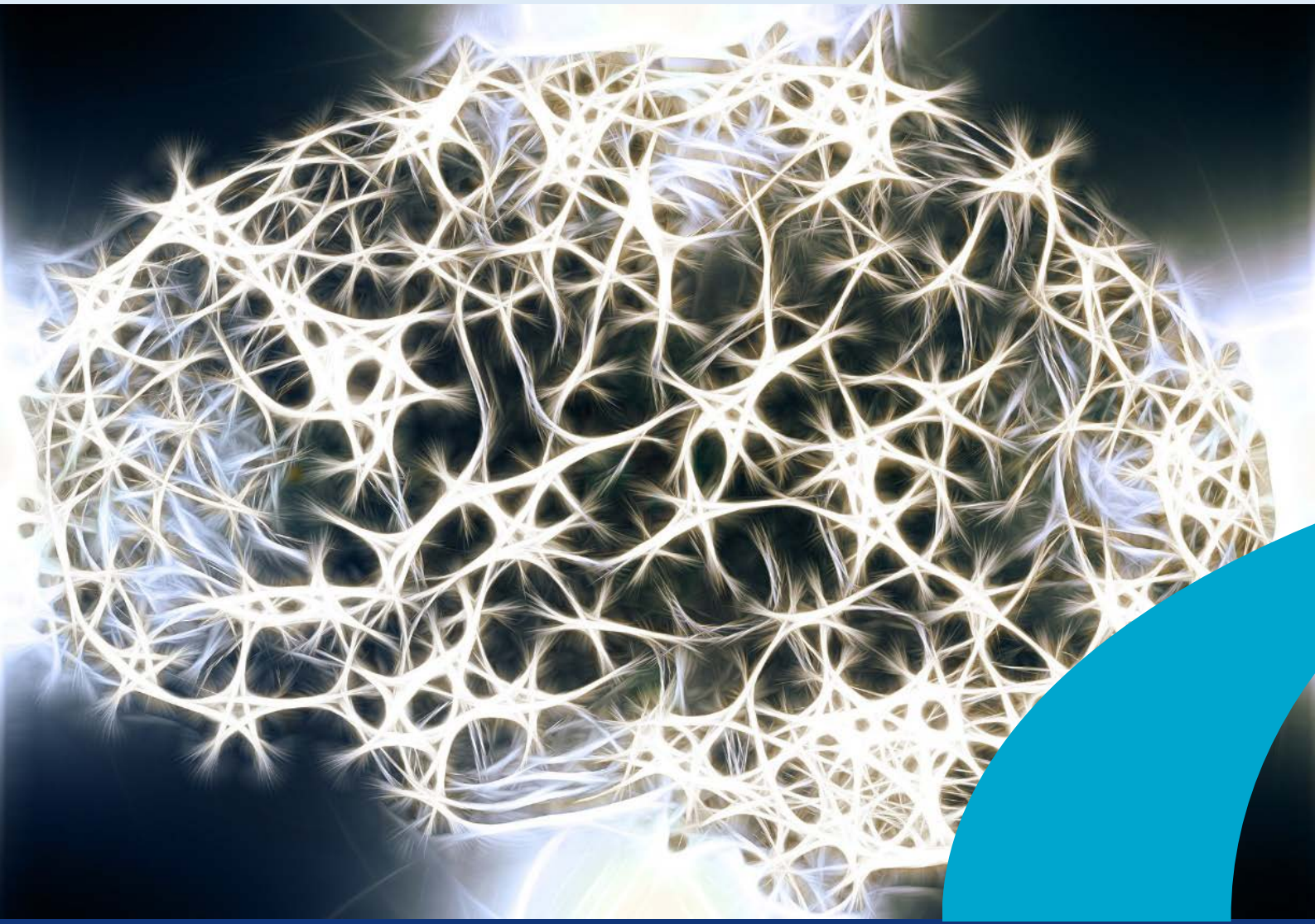
The "growth mindset" creates a passion for learning rather than a hunger for approval. It can be cultivated through effort and deliberate practice. Not only are people with this mindset not discouraged by failure, but they don't actually see themselves as failing – they see themselves as learning. This idea, of course, isn't new. What makes Dweck's work different, is that it is rooted in rigorous research on how the mind – especially the developing mind – works, identifying not only the core drivers of those mindsets but also how they can be reprogrammed.

You already know why this is important. If you want to keep pace with your competitors and tackle future challenges, you need to prepare your people to learn to change themselves. Attitudes affects behaviours, which affect results.

The good news is that our brains are not fixed – they can expand, grow and learn new things. Neuroplasticity allows our brains to continue to change, and this helps us stretch out of our comfort zones.

The science of neuroplasticity

In 2000, the Nobel prize for medicine was awarded for demonstrating that, as learning occurs, the connections among nerve cells increase. The scientist behind that discovery, Eric Kandel, also showed that learning can 'switch on' genes that change neural structure. Hundreds of studies went on to demonstrate that mental activity is not only the product of the brain but the shaper of it.



Building a "growth mindset"

Building that confidence, building that muscle is having a "**growth mindset**" – learning and growing so that come what may, your people will approach it as just another obstacle to overcome. Not an insurmountable challenge to be afraid of.

Dorothy Vaughan, Lessie Hunter and Vivian Adair – the "Human Computers"
Image via NASA

"I changed what I could, and what I couldn't, I endured"

If you have seen the film Hidden Figures I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. It's about these three ladies, who worked at Nasa in the very early 60s, in what was then still a segregated workplace:

- One was a mathematician – she helped write algorithms to calculate flight trajectories for the missions that took mankind into space
- One was an engineer. She earned an engineering degree – something that no woman (let alone a black woman) had ever done
- Dorothy Vaughan was supervisor for the typing pool. When the IBM Mainframe landed, no one knew how to use it. Dorothy learnt Fortran – by stealing a book from a library. She became an expert programmer. She not only saved her own job, but the jobs of the whole typing pool.

That is the sort of workforce organisations want to create, to future-proof themselves for the pace of change that is coming.

IKEA provides another great example of willing to adapt. One day the team was packing away some furniture and a casual remark about how much space a pair of table legs took up led to a revolutionary idea: what if we were to flat-pack our products? The rest is history, but it was a unique offering at the time.

3. Four steps to embedding a "growth mindset"

The practical ideas that follow will guide you through common change pitfalls so that you can embed the "growth mindset" for stronger people and a stronger organisation.

Step 1. Ensure people understand the reasons for change

Communicate clearly, take the time for people to understand the situation, the immediate context, especially the WHY we need to change, and the purpose.

Have you ever felt:

"I don't want to be held responsible or accountable for something that I do not agree with or don't understand"?

It's a very natural sentiment. Understanding the point of upheaval makes it easier to engage people with that change. (Just like a driver seeing a "School" sign and understanding why the speed limit is 20mph.)

Step 2. Maintain trust and openness

You need to create a safe environment of trust and openness so people feel safe learning and trying out new things.

Don't follow the example of the retailer that implemented a strict new inventory system that left employees in tears. It included bi-weekly walk-throughs and random quizzing of staff to test them. Score cards were used to evaluate each employee, who felt like they were being punished. "The stress has created such a tense working environment," a supervisor reported.

This brings us neatly to the next step.

Step 3. Provide autonomy and choice

This is how our brains react to perceived threats and rewards:

THREAT
Away from

Anxious, think less clearly

- Uncertainty
- Too many unknowns
- Lack of information
- Lack of control

REWARD
Towards

Willing to learn, motivated

- Certainty, information
- Feeling in control
- Being listened to
- Have some autonomy

People need to have a sense of control – some autonomy to feel they can make a choice, rather than everything being imposed on them.

It is just human nature: when you sense you have choice, something that felt stressful can feel more manageable. Which approach do you prefer when you're having your first meal in a new culture? A buffet, or "you get what you're given."

Finding a way to make a choice, however small, has a measurable impact on the brain. It shifts a person from a Threat response towards a Reward response.

It helps empower people.

Step 4. Track progress, review, learn and adapt

It takes sustained effort to bring about change, so it is vital to build in the practice of continually reviewing and reflecting.

Staff will respond with invaluable insights if they are given the scope to talk about what's going well, what not so well, and what is working brilliantly.

Just because we have a set way of doing things doesn't mean we need to carry relentlessly on along that path. We can refine our approach and change course if necessary.

Here is another eye-opening McKinsey finding:

Organisations that track Key Performance Indicators as normal, business-as-usual practice are 7x more likely to have successful transformations.

When people are encouraged to improve and refine what has been implemented, longer-term success is 4x more likely.

And remember to celebrate successes along the way – good news is infectious, and a powerful motivator.

Further resources and development

References

McKinsey survey

Example of company introducing new inventory system

How do Neuroplasticity and Neurogenesis rewire your brain

Youtube 'Did you know' facts about technology evolution

Further resources

ChangeQuest insights https://www.changequest.co.uk/insights/

APMG International website https://apmg-international.com/product/clca

Change Management Institute https://www.change-management-institute.com/

Agile Business Consortium https://www.agilebusiness.org/

Training

Developing Resilience and Change Readiness

Masterclass
Resilience and Change Readiness

Learn the skills of 'transformative resilience' and develop a change-ready mindset that transforms challenges into opportunity. It's not about bouncing back – it's springing forward! Find more information here

Change Management Certification

APMG International™
Change Management

The definitive Practitioner qualification for professionals in organisational change, transition and transformation roles covers a wide range of best-practice tools and approaches. You will gain fresh skills to successfully deal with all aspects of change. Find more information here

Change Agent Certification

APMG International™
Certified Local Change Agent

Change Agents play a critical role during organisation-wide transformation. This two-day, accredited qualification equips them with the necessary tools, techniques and skills to support people, helping them to adapt and embrace change. Find more information here

Helping you and your organisation learn and grow

Working in project and change management across different continents and with diverse cultures, I became fascinated by what makes people tick. I found I was continually bridging the gap between the process side of delivering projects and the need to bring people along on the journey so they would embrace what was delivered.

This experience, combined with a deep heart-felt desire to support others to learn and grow led me to set up ChangeQuest 10 years ago. We provide training and support to help people manage projects and change more effectively and with less stress.

On my own quest for learning and growth, gaining qualifications aside, I co-edited the Change Management Body of Knowledge and The Effective Change Manager's Handbook, which is the source text for APMG International's Change Management Practitioner certification and wrote the handbook Titanic Lessons in Project Leadership.

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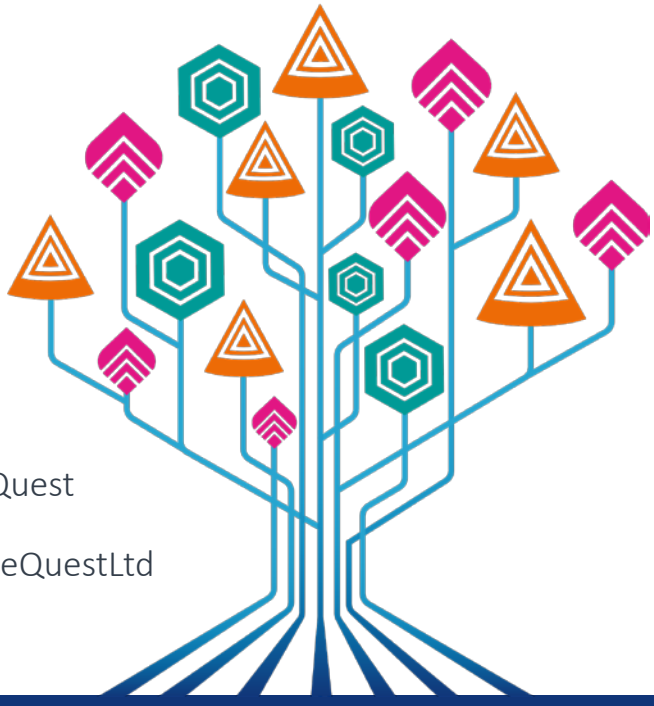
We offer accredited and bespoke training and coaching in:

Change management
Project management
People skills

Please call or email us to learn more about how to manage people, projects and change more effectively and with less stress.



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