

# Episode 83 The Impact of Change

## with Dr. Susanne Evans

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**Susan:** [00:00:00] Today, I am delighted to be joined by Dr. Susanne Evans, Susanne, you are so welcome to life beyond the numbers

**Susanne:** Thank you for having me I'm so looking forward to it.

**Susan:** So am I, because we almost forgot to turn on the record button we were having such a great chat. So hopefully that's a good sign of what's to come.

So I've read a number of your blogs. And one that really stood out for me was where you said you often liken working in organizations to undertaking an archaeological excavation, where you have to dig through the layers to really understand what is going on. And I spent a lot of my childhood with my dad going around from archaeological site to another one to another one. And so I kind of really get the analogy, but I'd love to know what you mean exactly by that.

**Susanne:** Well a bit like you, I have a really deep love of history and archaeology and my [00:01:00] childhood was the same going to look at stuff. And actually my adulthood is continued. So it's something that underpins my whole life.

And I think when I was reflecting on the work I've done over the years, so much of it when you go in as a consultant is trying to figure out why. It is, as it is in an organization or in a team. And quite a few years ago, I was working in a local government organization doing a big restructure and on day one, I sat down with one of the senior guys and he gave me all these charts. And I was looking at him and I was thinking, well, some of these, they don't make any sense, what's this team doing over there.

And so I said, well, what's going on here? And he said, oh, well so-and-so, didn't get on with so-and-so so we had to make another team so that it would work. And I was thinking, okay, fine. And so that's when I started thinking about you have these artifacts in organizations, charts and pictures and cultural things, and ways of working and visions and all this stuff, but there's a reason why [00:02:00] it's there.



And I felt like you need to dig underneath. I think it's captive. He always talks about you have to lift the rug on an organization and look at the snake underneath. And I think it's really important. When I was doing my PhD research, I realized it doesn't happen very often in organizations.

So organizations have always moving forward. Much of my work is around organization change. So obviously that's future facing, but actually what we don't do enough of is looking backwards and thinking about, why is this organization as it is, why is this team as it is? Why are these things going on?

What created them? And so that I suppose is where the analogy came from. And my PhD thesis was actually called digging the dirt and archaeology of stories, because it was all about stories that I gathered. But people in an organization going through change had told me about how they felt about what was going on.

And a lot of that related to things that had happened in the past that they were bringing to bear on what was happening to them in the future. So for me, [00:03:00] history is as important, if not more important than actually looking forward in organizations.

**Susan:** That's fascinating. And while you're talking about. It reminds me of my auditing days, where we would go in and excavate. You could say the previous year's transactions to make sense of the financial position today. And also a lot of my accounting career was looking backwards and trying to make sense of the past to understand, how we would move forward. And it's not valued, is it?

**Susanne:** No. No. And that is really difficult because if as an external consultant or as a leader you're trying to make a change land.

If you're basically saying that everything that happened in the past was rubbish and you're changing it for something new. You're basically saying to people, well, everything you did in the past was rubbish. I mean, now I need to do something different. People wonder why people don't grab change and get excited [00:04:00] about it?

Well, they won't, because you're sort of saying that everything that happened before was hopeless and we need to change it. So I think it is really important to acknowledge that. And I use a lot of appreciative inquiry in my work and the big part of that is around valuing the best of what is, now.

What I've found is if during a change, if you're able to talk about, well, what's working really well right now. How come we take that forward? And if people can see that and understand as well as what's going to change, it helps make change a lot easier for people to cope with. And actually we don't need to be constantly changing everything all the time.



There will always be something that works and that people value. And so a big part of it is helping people understand what that is and then make them feel comfortable with that. Okay. This thing I really like, and that's staying the same, something has to change, but I understand why. And it just makes it a much easier process.

None of the past is acknowledged or talked about. You don't really understand the things that have happened in the past that might be anchoring people into the past and [00:05:00] preventing them from moving forward. And that could be all sorts of things. It could be a change program that went wrong or really awful leader in the past that has created an atmosphere in the organization. There's sorts of things. But if no one ever talks about those and understands that, then you don't understand the impact that that's going to have on what's happening in the here and now.

**Susan:** Absolutely. I always think there's a fear as well, that if we change this, I might lose my job. And I think that often underpins, or I might not be able to do it for some reason, because I've done it like this for so long. And then we think people are just being awkward or difficult or something.

**Susanne:** Yeah. And I think that is such an issue for people. There's a lovely model, the scarf model by David Rock, which I use all the time and helping people think about the impact of change on people and a big part of it is around people feeling secure. People feeling that they [00:06:00] understand the impact that this is going to have on them, on their relationships. Uncertainty because uncertainty is a really hard thing for people to deal with.

And I think a big part of fear of change, resistance of change are those questions about what's in it for me. And am I going to be able to cope exactly as you say, in this new world. Are my skills going to be valued. Is it going to expose something of myself I don't want to expose. And so it's really important when talking about change, communicating change to people that you think about those factors.

I always use scarf to say when you're writing anything about change, make sure you've got those factors in it so that people can read it or hear it. And. Oh, okay. I understand how this is going to impact on me and my life. They still might not like it, but it helps them get over those initial kind of, oh, I don't like this feelings.

**Susan:** Yeah. And it's, I don't like it, but it's also. I'm not sure. It's like you said, the uncertainty, isn't it. And we haven't even got a chance maybe [00:07:00] to like, or dislike, but we are hanging on to something that matters to us. And there is no acknowledgement of that perhaps. It's kind of like get with the program, fit in or, you know, out you go,

**Susanne:** Yes. And I think it's having that time to reflect and reflect backwards and change. As I said before, it's always about moving forward without taking the time to reflect and having a bit of thinking time, is really important. And when I was doing my own research,



just going around, chatting to people and gathering stories, There was all sorts of weird stories that popped up that were actually having an impact on the change.

So one of them is funny, but it's actually quite sad when you think about it. So this organization I was working with where it's an old organization, very little change. They were having to make redundancies for the first time, because they were closing some offices and this was a big deal.

And they took it really slowly because they realized that they could only move as fast as people in the [00:08:00] organization could move, which is a great thing to do. But there was no thought given to some of the small things that happened that actually were affecting how people were feeling. So in this one particular office, they had Christmas they had all the Christmas decorations.

They knew that they wouldn't be in the office by the next Christmas, cause it would have shocked. So they gathered up all the Christmas decorations, put them in a box, stuff them under the stairs in the office and someone said, oh, I'll take those to the local hospital. And they can use those to decorate the hospital, which is a lovely thing.

But then that person left. And so the Christmas decorations didn't move. And then a story started circulating that, oh, well the office isn't closing because the Christmas decorations are still under the stairs. And if the office was closing, they would have been taken away. So it about six months time when the senior managers came on site to talk about redundancies and to give people their notice and all that sort of thing, all hell broke loose because this story had been doing the rounds so that it wasn't going to close because of these Christmas decorations.

And it's a [00:09:00] tiny, tiny thing that nobody would have thought of, but the symbolism of that. People who are going through uncertainty and stress were attaching to these things and no one had even considered that people would think that that was real, but it became real because everyone talks about it.

**Susan:** That's it isn't, it perception is reality. And we often forget that we, you know, we think it's facts and evidence and whatever, but I actually, as humans we hang on to something or we cling to something to give it meaning. And there we made meaning out of something so simple.

**Susanne:** No, I'm, you know, I'm not saying I would have done a better job because I'm not sure I would, because I don't think I would have even considered that people would be creating meaning from that.



But it just goes to show that if leaders take some time to listen to the stories that are being told and to talk to people about what they're thinking of, what they're feeling then that might have been uncovered and a lot of upset could have been avoided. As it goes no one had bothered to [00:10:00] listen to any of that stuff. And so it came as a big surprise to everybody.

**Susan:** And is that one of the things that happens as well? Susanne is this disconnect perhaps between those who are bringing about the change and those who are living through it as such. Change is often a top down approach where I suppose if you look at the change curve, as an example, people can go through the change curve as they're making the decision, we need to change this, but then they forget that everyone else has to go through this curve too, to adapt the change.

**Susanne:** Yeah. So everyone has their own process and I don't use the change curve in my own work. I have created my own version, which is like a big scribbly mess in the middle with the beginning of the end of the change and a big tangle in the middle because I think people kind of, they.

Don't go along the curve. They go backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards. So a big scribbly mess for [00:11:00] me represents how people are, but everyone's change is different. And the way that people react is different based on who they are and their own ability to deal with uncertainty. Everyone has different levels of tolerance.

And I think the other thing that goes a bit wrong is that leaders and managers often focus too much on advocating for the change rather than inquiring about how people are and how people are feeling and what needs to change and what doesn't need to change. And my colleague Alan, on it always likens it to trying to sell a pen to somebody.

So if you had a shiny pen and you were trying to sell the pen, if you just told them how shiny the pen was, they probably wouldn't be that interested. Whereas if you were telling them how this pen could meet their writing needs they might be more interested in the pen. But we always focus on the shiny pen, the benefits of this change, rather than really talking to people, asking questions, and listening.

And I think it's partly because of time. Maybe leaders don't want to do it. There's this whole thing around wanting to have all the answers and wanting to [00:12:00] show that it's all been thought through and not wanting to invite awkward conversations may be.

And I think that there's a fear about reaction. What if someone gets upset, what if someone gets angry? And we need to be okay with all of that as leaders and managers and just to be all right with people having reaction that's natural and human and we, we need to be comfortable.



And I think the other thing is just around resistance. Sometimes leaders and managers feel that if they invite too many questions, then they invite more resistance to the change. Whereas actually I found in my own experience it's the opposite. The more questions you invite and discuss and have open conversations about the less resistance there will be.

**Susan:** Change is one of those things that people get wrong all the time. I don't know what the statistics are, but it's something like 80% of big change projects are 70% fail. So people know what they're doing is not, they don't know it's not going to work, but do [00:13:00] they somehow think it's not going to happen to me?

**Susanne:** I think, yeah. Sometimes I think, and actually it's really hard to measure the success of change because a big part of that is whether it was clearly defined at the beginning or not, what are the benefits of this? And I, and I think it's, it is pretty hard to, to figure that out. Leaders sometimes think that they will be different.

So their process will be different. I mean, consultants will tell you that they are different. They will enable you to be different. Actually there's no magic bullet for any of this. It's just working hard all the time to listen to people. I always talk about decent conversations, it's about, let's just have some decent conversations in organizations.

I bang the drum about it all the time, but there's a lot of talk in organizations everyone's talking all the time, but no, one's really listening to each other. And as I said before, they can't being prepared for the outcome. There's so much fear of. I'm doing inverted, [00:14:00] compensated bad reactions, you know, emotion.

And actually we shouldn't be afraid of that. It's natural and normal and we should be right with people showing emotion and just accept it. So I think for me, the kind of big change programs are always on a bit of a hiding to nothing. It creates a lot of resistance. It's difficult for people.

And I actually think it's better to have an environment of lots of continuous smaller changes, rather than some massive big bang change program, because they are always really difficult to implement and, and I don't think they've always needed. Mm.

**Susan:** And it's just bringing to mind something like changing a finance system, because often that is going to be a big change just because the nature of it is, has to be as well.

And some of the reason I think that they're so difficult to implement at times is the language that the finance department speaks in comparison to everybody else. And I think that would probably be the same for any team [00:15:00] that brings in something new that they have their own language around it.



And like you say, there's lots of talking, but not a lot. Listening, but also understanding. Cause if I don't understand, I might be afraid to ask you to explain it.

**Susanne:** Yeah, you're so right. And you think about a big change program, the communications that go around that, the training or whatever, it all comes down from on high, and there's no tailoring of, different circumstances.

I got on a project a couple of years ago where we actually did individual training and comms for every single team in the organization. And it landed so much better because we could respond to everything that people were dealing with within their team, we could use their language, we could get their managers involved in doing it.

The last thing that anyone needs is a sheep dip of this has changed and this is how change affects you. People don't need that. People know that. It's about what is happening here and how does it affect you? And going back to what you said before, that is the key, people will be [00:16:00] frightened, especially if a new system and if they've used the old system for donkey's years that's really scary for people because they worry whether they'll be able to use it or not, so that you can get over that by trying to be a bit more personalized in your approach, rather than just creating a document, a PowerPoint set of presentation or whatever.

That's going to tell everyone what's going to happen. If that doesn't really hit the spot, I think you can still create that stuff, but then it's for a team leader to tailor it and talk about it in a way that's gonna make sense to their team..

**Susan:** Hmm. It's funny. Cause as you were talking, I mean, everything you're saying makes so much sense.

So what happens that all of this goes out the window as such, because I think people probably start off when they're bringing about change, trying to do exactly what you say, but it just doesn't work like that. And I didn't know, we've talked about this a bit, but I'm still curious as to how. [00:17:00] Common sense for want of a better word goes out the window.

**Susanne:** I don't know whether I have the answer to that. But in my experience, I think sometimes people feel like they have to do a big thing, a big program in order for it to be effective. It has to be the whole change program with a big spreadsheets and, project planning and, a project an office, a program management office, et cetera, et cetera.

And then they start using change words like transformation and things like that as a way to make it Official and like, they know what they're doing. And I think then what gets lost is this





kind of human touch to it, which is exactly, as you said, the common-sense approach to doing change, which is just treat people like human beings.

Back in the day when I used to work in HR and I'd be talking to managers about doing redundancies and things like that. And, and they tell, I don't know what to say. And I would say. Just imagine that it's you, if you [00:18:00] were being made redundant, how would you like to be talked to, and then just do that?

That's it, that's all we need to think about, but somehow the kind of humanness is lost and it becomes a process of change rather than just trying to encourage people to do things in a different way. And that aspect of it is lost. You know, it's always like thinking about big technology programs.

For me, it's always like the three-legged stool. You've got technology process people and the technology and processes, the bit that everyone focuses on the people, but it's the bit that falls off the list because everyone's really busy. But actually if you don't have that, then none of the other stuff work.

And you must've seen this, I know I have, where a big new it systems been put in and people start creating workarounds because they don't like it. Go back to their spreadsheets and also the point of that. So I just think maybe it's easier to hide behind the spreadsheet rather than actually deal with some of the uncomfortable reality of leading people through change.

**Susan:** Yeah. I also think people [00:19:00] just underestimate that bit. They just think everybody's going to fall into line or just get on with it, or they're paid enough money to just do it. And it is a bit like, you know, when I started work first, you left your personal side at the door, or are you left your emotions at home?

There was no place for it. This is a place of facts and figures, evidence, data reason can logic. And even though all of those words, when you apply them to people, you can get that to, , there's a logic to involving people. There's a reason to involve people. The evidence will show you that actually it's about the people. And I say numbers don't inspire people do. And it's the same isn't as with change doesn't necessarily inspire, but the people do. Yes.

**Susanne:** Yeah. And I, yeah, I feel [00:20:00] so. Right. I nodding along as you're talking and I think it's easier to hide behind the numbers and the spreadsheets and the process and the process maps and the project plan and all that. That's easy, you can sit there and create that.

The bit that is difficult is the people, because people are unpredictable and I have their own journeys we talked about, their own way of dealing with change and people can resist and that's annoying for people. And, that's the part leaders don't always like to dealing with. So





they go back to what feels comfortable, which is the process and the chart they can, you know, we're doing really well, but we were supposed to be here and now we're here. As you say, that's not inspiring. The inspiring thing for people is to hear the story about why this change needs to happen and what it's going to look like when you get to the other side and all that sort of thing, but that's the stuff that's hard. And so we naturally shy away from stuff that's difficult and focus on the things that's easy.

And I think that's what happens on a lot of changes. It all gets a bit difficult. And [00:21:00] so everyone just retreats into some program management activity rather than actually thinking, well, how can we take people along with us?

**Susan:** If you look at the statistics then for the great resignation or 80% of people are disengaged at work, all of that is because the human aspect is not being fully considered. Because I do think people that are trying to look at people better, but I suppose we don't know how deep to go.

**Susanne:** No. And I think the whole thing with engagement for me is a bit like resistance to change. Now we all have good days and bad days, and I think there are days when you will be engaged and there's days when you won't. And I think the challenge with any of that is to deal with it flip-flopping that people have.

one day you can absolutely love your job and the next day you hate it. And I think that goes for everybody in every organization. And I think that's what makes it difficult. But it also means that [00:22:00] looking at the data on a particular day, you don't know what that means.

It's useful to unpack., 80% of disengaged. What does that actually mean? What are they doing that shows that they're disengaged? Because there's a big difference between someone coming in everyday and doing their job, but perhaps not doing quite as much as they could do than somebody who is engaging in very difficult disengaged behaviour.

I worked on a change program years ago where when the office was closed, people went in at the end of the day, filled the toilets with toilet rolls, flushed all the toilets sinks and flooded the office. That is disengagement in a big way. Most people wouldn't ever get to that point. What does it mean if people are disengaged. If they're doing their job, then maybe that's okay. Do we need them to be engaged all the time.

So I think that's the conversation that needs to be had is what does that look like? How is it manifesting itself in people's behaviours? How are people feeling? What are they doing in their day? And if it means they're just having an hour and a half for lunch instead of an hour, or? Well, it may be that's. [00:23:00] Okay.



**Susan:** Well, yeah, as long as the work is getting done exactly. And I suppose what's getting in the way of getting done is really if you want to get to.

**Susanne:** Yeah. It's about having those really honest conversations in teams about people feeling safe, to be able to be really honest about how they're feeling.

**Susan:** Do we know how to do that though?

**Susanne:** Not really. I think again, it's. Do people feel safe, to be honest. There's that whole thing about psychological safety isn't there. And whether people feel that they can really have those conversations and then if they don't, how do we create an environment where they do?

And I think it's about then they feel it's worth having those conversations because they see an impact of what they've said. So it's a bit like when you go to the supermarket, you know, they have the kind of, you said we did thing on the wall. You said the trolleys had got squeaky wheels and we got some more trolleys.

I think it's, it's doing that sometimes, but then more so that people feel [00:24:00] like their time is not wasted having the conversations about what needs to change. And that there's some action that's taken as a result.

**Susan:** Yeah. I suppose the simplicity of the Christmas decoration one keeps coming back for me because often it is these really small and they're not small at the time, but they're things that we tend to gloss over and think they won't matter. There are all these small things that make our working day easier that we probably care about.

**Susanne:** I think we care about that a lot. And it's probably Too much in a way. I think some of the hardest things I've ever had to implement it in organizations, it's not the big stuff.

It's moving people's car parking spaces around or implementing a hot desking policy. That sort of thing is just the worst because people don't like it. And in my own experience, I went from being in one organization to another, when the organization was bought out, this is very early on in my career and [00:25:00] the chocolate biscuits in the meetings.

So they went from being really nice chocolate biscuits. So first of all, not very nice biscuits and then no biscuits. And The toilet rolls changed. And it's the second time I've mentioned toilet rolls, but they changed from nice toilet rolls, horrible toilet rolls. And it was a time of stress because people were changing jobs and changing employer and, you know, that's always a difficult period.



And then these things along with it just created this feeling well, they don't really care about us at all. And. It's a tiny thing and it was probably cost-saving or whatever. I said how many thousands of the chocolate biscuits costs a year, but it made a difference to people's lives. And, and I think we don't consider those at our peril because we can do the big stuff, but the small stuff really matters too.

**Susan:** Yeah. We ignored the smallest. We can do the big stuff. We might not do it very well. So yeah,

**Susanne:** that's true, actually. Yeah. So we need to look at everything, the small stuff and the big stuff.

**Susan:** And this is the [00:26:00] engagement part for me is actually, if you want to talk about engagement, then it means engaging with people.

**Susanne:** Yes. That's two way. Not just me telling you things or giving him some engagement, survey results and beating around the head with them. Actually let's talk about what this means. What do you want? What's going to motivate you. What are you interested in? Why do you come into work? All of these things are the conversations that are worth having.

**Susan:** Yeah. They are. And again, why don't we have them. I'm really curious because is it because no, one's had them with us.

**Susanne:** Maybe. Yeah, I think, yes. I think that could be it. I, I definitely think I know I said it before, but I think there's a fear of vulnerability then leaders, managers, sometimes that they don't want to open that Pandora's box in case, first of all, someone reacts in a way that they find hard to cope with.

Secondly, in case someone asks for something that they can't give them. Because I think there's a big desire to have all the answers and be able to solve people's problems. And if someone says, I want a [00:27:00] Ferrari and they can't be given a Ferrari, then how did we deal with that situation?

And I think that puts people off. If they ask too many questions, they might eventually hear something that they don't like, but I think you're right. I think a big part of it is that it hasn't happened to us. So we don't feel in a position to be able to do it in a meaningful way, because we don't know where to start.

And there's also a big fear of getting things wrong, saying the wrong thing. And we need to get over that and just think if I say the wrong thing and I'll just apologize and start again. And that that's absolutely fine



**Susan:** and it is. There's a great power in that as well. There's a great power. First of all, in saying I don't have the answer to that, or I don't know, but let me look into it and get back to you. And as long as you keep your words, then you've done what you can. And there's also a great power in being open and being vulnerable like that. I think a lot about heart bringing yourself to work and emotions, hearts, and all of that.

And somebody said to me recently, heart [00:28:00] in French is *cour*. Courage comes from that. So actually courage is really the heart of the matter. And having courage means bringing your heart into the conversation.

**Susanne:** Yeah. Definitely. I so agree. It is that courage.

And I think there's a whole load of language around difficult conversations, which I absolutely loathe. We shouldn't be calling them difficult cause it stops people from wanting to do them. We should be calling them uncomfortable conversations because they make people feel uncomfortable, but then we need to be doing some work on ourselves and others to enable us to be. Okay with feeling uncomfortable and accepting that it's just a part of life and that's fine.

you think about all the courses that are out there having difficult conversations and it just creates this thing where people resist doing it because they think, oh, well, that's too hard.

I don't want to do it. I'll avoid that conversation. So they don't. And exactly, as you said, if it's [00:29:00] not something that we've experienced in our working life then it's going to put us off even more. Whereas actually, if we make people comfortable with being uncomfortable, that's the starting point, I think, to all of this.

**Susan:** Absolutely. And I always say to people, difficult conversation. Think about why it's difficult for you because actually the conversation is not difficult. It's the thought that you put into it that makes it difficult. And there's a psychologist, Susan Davis I really love her stuff, but she says basically that discomfort is the price you pay for a meaningful life.

Yeah, so actually get comfortable, like you say, being uncomfortable and that actually, the more times you do, it's like anything, isn't it. You get better with practice. It doesn't mean it gets easier, but you get better. And often I think the uncomfortable [00:30:00] conversations get passed down. Yes to somebody more junior or to somebody you don't really want around.

And then you're not actually taking responsibility for your actions and that then further causes way of undermining the change process. The director says, oh, I can't be bothered with these conversations. Give them stunts, his direct reports are hers. Then they go down another layer because they can't be bothered and they don't have time.



And so suddenly, it's also the rumour, the story changed every layer you missed out on.

**Susanne:** Yeah. And the classic communication tool used in change is the big town hall meeting where some big wig comes in and talks about what's going to happen and that's fine. And it's a part of it, but I've seen so many of those disastrous because no one gets the opportunity to ask a real question because it all has to be done in advance and you're not allowed to just stick your hand up and ask whatever you want.

I did hear a story the other day, which I loved about a really senior [00:31:00] guy who came in to a public sector organization and said, you can ask me anything.

Anything at all. And someone stood up and said, how can you justify how much you're paid in comparison to how all of us are paid? And apparently there was like a collective in the room. Could this question be asked? And the guy said, no, that's fair enough. I get paid this much per year. The average salary in this place is this, but I get paid more than you. I acknowledge that. But this is why and talks about all the different things that they had to do. And dealt with it in a really honest and human way. And then more questions are asked. What's happening here, what's happening here. And just, as you said before, he said, I don't know the answer to that.

I'll get back to you. And he did. And he turned up at people's offices and talk to them about things and if that's the way to do that properly. When that doesn't happen and when the communications are poor, There's a hole and a gap and people fill it in exactly, as you said, with rumours and stories.

And because that's how our brains work, any form of uncertainty, we try and connect together, different things that we see in a way that makes sense. And [00:32:00] the creation of a story about how those two things are linked is what happens. Conspiracy theories is a classic case of this where different things are joined together that were never meant to be joined together, but we do it in a way to make ourselves feel better. And so it's really important to keep that flow going.

A big thing I do with leaders is to take the PowerPoint thing that they've created to talk about what was happening and then get them to talk about it in a way that makes sense to them. So an old teacher always talks about the teachable points of view and that's the underpinning.

Let's ditch the slides, let's not even go there. Let's use them to tell a story about what's going to happen and it requires more work and it requires more effort and it requires you to put something of yourself out there, your hearts and your vulnerability, but it means people get it more than if you just stand there and parrot off a load of slides.



Like you're reading the weather forecast. It takes effort. Again, going back to your question, why it, people do it, but it's harder. It takes more time. It's much easier to just stand up and do a town hall with like [00:33:00] five questions that you've pre-approved then to say to people, ask me whatever you want and I'll answer it. And it's a lot less scary to do it that way.

**Susan:** Yeah, it's also short term thinking, which is really what has the world in the problems. Most of the time, as much as we're very, short-term focused the next quarter. What do we have to do in this quarter? And we don't think long-term because actually, if you take the evidence that change programs fail

and then you understand why they failed wouldn't you try to do everything in your power, so that didn't happen and not think oh it's not going to happen to me because that's not really the right answer there.

**Susanne:** No, I know, but I think a big issue here is if you look at the thing that's been written about change failure, and you look at what a lot of the changes consultancies are saying they offer the solution to everyone's problems, which is [00:34:00] follow this eight step process. And at the end, all your dreams will come true and the change will have happened. And of course, that isn't life, that's not reality. And people still get into the short-term process and into this process of kind of, oh, well, if I follow this process, it's all going to be fine.

And that doesn't enable us to respond to what happens day to day. And that's the bit that's hard. Steve Hearsum, who I love his work, always talks about no silver bullet and it's this kind of tension between organizations and consultants that the organizations are looking for a solution to their problems.

The consultants want to give them a solution so that they feel better. And so on and on it goes and actually turning around and saying to a client. I'm not gonna be out to help you fix this. It's going to be difficult and we're going to have to work really hard. And I got no roadmap for you. We're just going to take it each day as it comes.

That's quite a hard sell for some organizations, but actually that's the reality. And I think as a profession [00:35:00] and in organizations, we're only just starting to step away from. Here's my diagram of the process to follow for successful change. And actually to be really honest and say, I have no diagram, I have experience.

And, and we can use that. But actually it's about responding to what's in front of you rather than coming up with this huge plan of what's going to happen when, and it's a much more scary place to be. And there's a bit of a momentum now I think about a recognition of how life is, and that you can't solve all these problems with a diagram and a process, but we're not quite there yet. I don't think



**Susan:** no, we're not. We're definitely not. But I think, yeah, like you say, there are some organizations that are at least opening up to them and, and seeing. Under estimating, the human part of change is a kind of a hiding to nowhere, really.

And you'll only have yourself to blame. You can't even blame it on your staff. It's on you.

**Susanne:** And then people do you see? Cause then you get [00:36:00] into this whole discussion about what that is just them being difficult. They're difficult. It's a difficult group of people. They resist change. They resist any change, and that's just not true.

And I used to have that viewpoint. Definitely, if you'd asked me when I'd experienced the older flooding the office, then I would have said that people are very difficult, but actually that's a sign of something that's gone very, very wrong in the organization.

And for me you can't blame this on, on others as a leader. If people are not doing what you would like them to do, then you have to ask yourself why. And do you need to be getting into that to try and understand what's going on? What's missing for them. Why are they not following your lead or your direction that you think makes a lot of sense?

There is something missing and people who question and resist actually for me I like super engages in the process. They're interested enough in what's going on to ask questions and to want more information. The people you need to worry about the people who actually really don't seem to care. And don't bother getting [00:37:00] involved.

And my own view of all of this has changed hugely over my career. I think back in the day, I would have seen people as a bit of a pain and, as something that we needed to think about, but when like a disruption to the process. That's completely changed. And over the last 25 years, and now it's much more around, the other stuff you can do, but if you don't get the people's stuff, right, it's all gonna fall over and you won't get any benefit. And it would just be like pushing a rock up a hill. It's going to be really hard work and really unpleasant.

**Susan:** Absolutely. And it sounds like I became a finance director as 33 and I realized that I needed to have much better people skills than I did finance skills.

But actually, the finance parts was easy. The technical stuff was easy, but it was getting people on board and relating to people that was important. And that was where my career took a big shift as well, because then people became way more important and working with [00:38:00] people. And I think we're very quick to blame the behaviour.

And like you're saying as well, we're very quick to say, well that person's just awkward and that person's difficult. Oh my God, that person never stops talking or whatever it is rather than trying to understand what is causing that behaviour. And once you dig into that, then





yeah, you might not like it, but there are people like you who can help you get through it as well. And, and I actually, once people know you care, that's really what it's about.

**Susanne:** Exactly and showing three or actions, but don't you think you think about people progressing through their careers? So much of their progression is because of the technical ability that they have, they really good at finance or they really good at X and y and z.

But actually as you progress up, you do less of the thing that you were really good at, and you have to do more of the people management. But in organizations [00:39:00] we don't help people prepare for that aspect of work. And some of them actually dislike it, they shouldn't have people to manage they should be able to become like a technical specialist in their thing. But that never really seems to be an option. It's always upwards rather than sideways.

One of my clients was talking about how she really doesn't like the career ladder. It should be a career climbing frame is how she sees it. You go sideways and you go upwards. And so I think there's a lot going on in organizations that doesn't help with any of this stuff and a big part of that is that a lot of leaders have really bad people management skills.

**Susan:** They do. And are you familiar with the school of life? And I, I love their stuff. And one of the lines in one of her books is basically the problem at work is you want everyone else to be like, you. I just did what you did it at all, be fine, you know? And I think that's what it is. We do. We introduced some change. We think it's a great idea and why wouldn't everyone understand it, but we're not even taking into [00:40:00] account like anything. We haven't probably asked anyone else.

We haven't realized that people are afraid to challenge us. We haven't realized other people have great ideas too. Yeah. And I don't know. It's. I think definitely the last couple of years has disrupted how we do things. I saw somewhere recently, I need to look this up again, but I think it's a Goldman Sachs told everyone to come back to the office and 50% of people said NO.

Which if that's not, we're walking and our feet are doing the talking, then I don't know what is, so there's further disruption required. And the people that jump on the boat earlier and show that they care are the ones that will ride the next storm.

**Susanne:** Well, everything has changed. And actually, if everything hasn't changed, then it's a really wasted opportunity I think.

We have the chance now to recalibrate and to enable people to [00:41:00] bring their whole selves to work in a way that they have in the last couple of years. You now, see someone's life, don't you behind the zoom picture and their kids wandering in and out and the dog



coming in and things like that, which in the past might have been horrifying for people to have that

interaction between work and personal life, but it's there and we've seen it. And I think the world has to change this idea that you can only be productive if you're in the office five days a week is nonsense, it was always nonsense, but it was because it was how things were done. Equally the idea that no one ever needs to go in an office again is also nonsense. So it's about trying to find that happy balance between the two.

And, I keep talking about conversation, but I think that's, what's needed. It's really hard for organizations to set a policy and a strategy for this that's going to work for everybody. And you have to have guidelines, of course, but it's also about managers and leaders speaking to their teams and understanding where they're at.

And, you know, 50% of people are saying they want to come back into the office. Well, buy, you know, what is the purpose of that? The reason behind is it that they don't want to do it anymore. They've [00:42:00] lost the kind of structures that enabled them to do it. I don't know, but you need to try and understand that rather than sort of seeing it as a bad reflection, I suppose, on the people.

But also, a bigger conversation is, well, why do we even need to be in the office five days a week? Why have they decided that that's the thing? Is it because that's what they've always done or is it because there's genuinely reasoning and it's digging into all of that, I think is what's interesting. And what will help companies get through and emerge better than they were before?

**Susan:** Hmm. Well, let's hope

**Susanne:** I keep keeping my fingers crossed,

**Susan:** it's definitely back to conversation and the conversation is a two-way thing. That's the piece that's really missing. Isn't it that conversations tend to be one directional or left to HR

**Susanne:** yes. Another one of my bug bears.

**Susan:** Yeah, me too. Because if you're managing people or leading people, then you need to be able to do that.

**Susanne:** Yes. I think a [00:43:00] lot of organizations have almost created a whole layer of helpless managers who rely on HR to do things. And that comes from two directions. I think one. HR people. And I speak as well myself. In the past we like fixing problems for people. So



we almost want to solve the manager's problems. Two, there's a fear that if we leave it to managers, they'll get it wrong. And so HR needs to do it so it's consistent. And three managers are very happy for HR to take over some of these conversations that they don't want to have.

So it's created this perfect storm of, of HR who were kind of pushing to do more and line managers who are going, yeah, take that off me. I don't want to do it. And so I think it's about two directions. And it's having the systems in place that enable self service so that managers can start doing things themselves instead of having to rely on HR.

So there's lots of things that need to change to make it happen. And some of it's cultural, some of it's behavioural and learning, I think for managers. And let HR focus on the [00:44:00] strategic stuff rather than filling forms in and, chasing appraisal forms. It's not good use of people's time.

**Susan:** No, and I think really it's elevated people skills to be at the same level, if not higher than anything else.

**Susanne:** Yes, I, yeah, I think you've nailed it. That's absolutely right. That is the thing. If you're going to progress in this organization, you have to be really good at that stuff. And you need to show that you are, and if there's stuff you need to develop, we'll help you. And we'll mentor you. We'll show you people who are really good at this, and you can learn from them. Instead of just rewarding technical stuff rather than the people skills.

I remember, I don't know whether it's still true, but back in the day when I did a lot of work in local government and seeing job evaluation, that so much weight was given to technical staff in the job evaluation and hardly anything to, people management. Skills were, not valued and that needs to change because that's, what's going to make the difference.

**Susan:** And I suppose it comes back to measuring. It's easier to measure the [00:45:00] technical output than it is the people output, but however, retention rates, all of that, the feet are doing the talking that's what's going to be the measure for people to try and get right going forward. Hopefully.

**Susanne:** Yeah. I mean, maybe you could even ask people what they think of their manager. Imagine that.

**Susan:** And if you're a brave enough and you manage people, you could ask them what they think of you



**Susanne:** imagine doing that. And that's where you get some really interesting data around engagement where you're looking at individual teams and individual people, and what's making a difference and what's this person doing in comparison to that person.

That's far more interesting, I think, than how people responded on a wet Wednesday in November to an engagement questionnaire.

**Susan:** Absolutely. Wow. There's so much in there and there's so much more I could talk to you about it because it's fascinating because it really does come down to [00:46:00] people and understanding that.

And no matter which way we went around this topic, we keep coming back to the people side and yeah, it's great people are having these conversations, I suppose. And we're having these conversations because that's what makes change.

**Susanne:** Yes, it's definitely changing. And I think there's much more appetite now for looking at things in a different way. I'm certainly seeing it, which is great. One for that.

**Susan:** Brilliant. So, Susanne, if people would like to learn more about you or connect with you, how might they do that?

**Susanne:** So I am on LinkedIn. It's Dr. Susanne Evans, Susanne with an S not a Z. And I've got my website, which is, Feldspar consulting.

I've also got my own podcast, which has changed stories, which is all about making work a bit less rubbish. So yeah, connect with me on any of those platforms.

**Susan:** Brilliant. And I love the story about feldspar really quickly just tell everybody, why you chose [00:47:00] feldspar for your business.

**Susanne:** I really like gemstones and jewellery with interesting gemstones in. And so feldspar is, is a sort of quartz but it also has particular properties around change and transformation. So, because that's basically my job it seemed like the perfect thing to have, and moonstone is it's the classic feldspar, which of course is very changeable in different companies. That's why I chose it.

**Susan:** I think that's such a lovely story because I did wonder where did she get feldspar from? So it's such a love story to us. I have to constantly spell it. Like Susanne was an S. It's like an ongoing thing. Well, thank you so much for your time today, Susanne, it's been just lovely talking to at this stuff.

**Susanne:** You'll say welcome. It's been a real pleasure.

