



**Issue 3**



**CHANGE HE**  
DATA QUBED

# Change H.E.

## e-zine



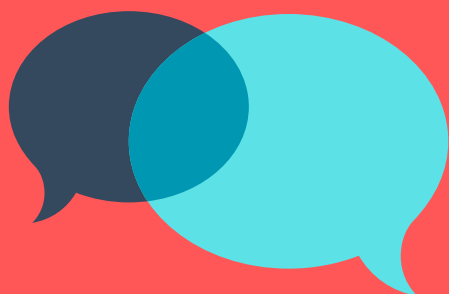
## Welcome Note

What happens when we make space for honesty -not just the polished kind, but the uncomfortable, messy, and vulnerable kind? At our latest Change H.E. Conversation, we found out.

Honesty in change isn't about blaming or venting. It's about naming what's real, even when it's inconvenient. It's about creating cultures where saying "we're not ready yet" is seen as a strength, not a weakness. And it's about recognising that transformation without truth isn't transformation at all.

This conversation struck a chord with so many that attended the session. From the challenges of organisational face-saving and blame culture, to the brave moments when someone finally spoke up, we heard it all. As always, we've captured not just the theory, but the lived experience of people leading and surviving change in higher education. In this issue, we share mic-drop moments, practical insights, and reflections from a powerful conversation with Kanika Selvan and Chloe Ward on truth-telling in higher education change work. If you've ever had to say the thing no one else would say...this one's for you.

Su Kulkarni - Founder, Change H.E.



# REFLECTIONS: APRIL CHANGE H.E. CONVERSATION

At our latest Change H.E. Conversation, facilitated by **Kanika Selvan** of Beetroot Consulting Ltd, and **Chloe Ward** of Imperial College London, we lifted the lid on something that's often left unsaid: the quiet, complicated presence of dishonesty in change programmes. Not lies, exactly - but the small (and sometimes, big) silences, unspoken fears, and collective avoidance that add up. It was a raw conversation. And it needed to be.

## The Real Reasons Projects Fail

We started with some hard truths - many of them sitting just outside the official project post-mortems and lessons-learned sessions.

Most higher education change projects don't fail because of technology. They fail because of **leadership**. Or more precisely, the absence of it. Lack of **clarity, fragile governance, disengaged sponsors**. People working in **silos**, while saying the word 'collaboration' and 'consultation' a lot.

We also talked about **data** - how we sometimes dress up partial or misread numbers as certainty. How easy it is to hide behind a dashboard instead of admitting we just don't know yet.

There was a collective nod when we reached **institutional ego** - the idea that "we're unique" becomes a defence mechanism.

It stops us from learning from others, from **borrowing, adapting, or accepting** that someone else might have figured it out already.

And yes - **change fatigue**. The slow, quiet erosion of energy that comes from too many overlapping initiatives, all urgent, all important, all under-resourced.

It's the cumulative weight of being stretched too thin, too often, with too little support. The **human cost** shows up in ways we don't always track.

**Disengagement. Burnout. Good people quietly stepping away.** But also in **sick leave**, rising **stress**, and the creeping **loss of confidence** among staff who were once deeply committed.

It spills into personal lives - **missed time** with family, **broken sleep, cancelled leave**, the feeling of **never quite catching up**. And the worst part? It becomes normalised.

Just the way things are.

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*When every change is  
a priority, then  
none of it becomes  
a priority*

- Veena Dhulipala  
Student Systems Manager, Imperial College London

## Where Does Dishonesty in Change Come From?

Sometimes dishonesty in change isn't a deliberate act. It's a set of **assumptions** we've **absorbed**, **repeated**, and **rarely challenged**.

In the session, we surfaced four beliefs that still quietly shape how change is approached in higher education.

### If We Build It, They Will Come

The first is the classic: "If we build it, they will come." It sounds hopeful, even visionary. But it **confuses delivery with adoption**. Just launching a new system, process, or policy doesn't mean people will use it; especially if they weren't brought along in the journey, don't feel it solves their problems, or haven't had the time or support to make it work for them.

### Top-down Transformation Works

It's comforting to think that change can be mandated, rolled out, or communicated into existence. But transformation that sticks comes from **trust** and **buy-in**, not broadcasts. People don't change because they're told to. They change because they believe in it.

## There's a silver bullet

The third fallacy is seductive: "There's a silver bullet." A new system, a policy refresh, a big consultancy brought in - these might help, but no one thing will "fix" everything.

Complex institutions require **layered, people-led solutions**. There are no shortcuts.

### Resistors are blockers

We often treat resistance as something to overcome, rather than investigate. But those who push back are often closest to the tensions we're trying to resolve. They're not always obstructive...they're observant and they care deeply about the process or system or policy about to be changed.

Listening to them could be what saves the project.

These fallacies don't always get said out loud. But they echo through boardroom decisions, project scoping documents, and steering group slides.

Challenging them isn't easy but it's essential if we want to create change that's **honest**, **inclusive**, and **lasting**.



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*“Normalising the notion of learning from mistakes means you need to first admit mistakes have been made.”*

- Rosie Downen

Project Delivery Manager, University of Bradford

## What Are The Barriers To Honesty in Change?

We asked the group: What makes it hard to be honest in this space?

The responses were powerful.

**Career risk. Organisational politics.** The **fear** of **being** seen as **negative** or **difficult**. The **pressure** to deliver results - to funders, students, colleagues - even when we know the **foundations aren't** b.

We spoke about **legacy culture** - how "this is how we've always done it" becomes a shield against challenge.

And about comms, especially how **hierarchical messaging** can silence the very people we need to hear from.

That there sometimes is no forum to speak up which would allow **feedback upwards**.



### Institutional Politics

Power dynamics, sometimes toxic ones, that silence certain voices



### Cultural Legacy

'This is how we've always done it' mentality



### Fear of Consequences

Career implications, funding cuts, damaged relationships



### Professional Identity

Admitting problems feels like professional failure



### Hierarchical Structures

Information flows top to bottom with no forum for upwards feedback



### Stakeholder Expectations

Pressure from students, staff, management and external bodies



What is said in public is not always aligned with what is said behind closed doors, leading to lack of integrity

- Tina Nettleton

Business Readiness & Change Manager, Edgehill University



## So Where Do We Go From Here?

After such an honest and thoughtful discussion, the question became: what do we do with all of this?

Kanika and Chloe's answer wasn't a neat checklist or a single solution. Instead, it was a call to keep the honesty going...to bring it with us into our own institutions, teams, and roles. Because while this conversation created a rare and powerful space for truth-telling, its real value lies in what we choose to do next.

The message was clear: **honesty is hard. It takes practice.** It can be **uncomfortable**. But it's also **essential**. And the worst thing we can do now is to leave this conversation and return to silence.

If we ever feel in our change projects that something isn't quite right, or a familiar problem is rearing its head - that moment is the time to action. Don't ignore it.

These Conversations that Change H.E. fosters and the **honest space** we've created, mustn't be allowed to fade and **we must not lose momentum**. Silence, in the face of **uncomfortable truth**, allows **damaging dynamics** to persist - often at the expense of our staff, our students, and the success of the change we're trying to lead.

So what might honesty look like in practice?

- It means asking, out loud, "What **truth** are we avoiding in this change?"
- It means **acknowledging unreadiness** instead of pushing forward for the sake of momentum.

- It means **valuing** professional services colleagues who raise concerns...not as barriers, but as critical **truth-tellers**.
- It means making **space** for difficult **conversations**, even (especially) when there are power dynamics at play.
- It means surfacing **assumptions**, identifying unspoken challenges, and actively asking: "**Whose voice is missing here?**"

And above all, it means making **honesty** a **shared practice**. Not something we wait for from leadership, or hope others will model first but something we commit to in our own behaviours, meetings, projects, and conversations.

Not because honesty is easy...but because ignoring it makes everything harder in the long run.

And while dishonesty can creep in quietly (through omission, over-optimism, or avoidance) **honesty requires intention**. And **courage**.

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H.E. runs on the goodwill of its staff to make personal sacrifices to keep the lights on. It was never sustainable, and it's starting to visibly crumble.

- Noelle Rumball  
Student Data Consultant



# A Time For Honesty

Kanika Selvan



When people ask me what's needed for change in higher education, I don't start with strategy. I start with honesty.

Not the "let's all be transparent in this meeting" kind of honesty that institutions sometimes perform.

I mean the kind that costs something. The kind that builds something. The kind you feel in your body before it forms into words. That honesty.

I didn't always know how powerful that could be. Like many of us, I learned to speak fluently in institutional lingo overlaid with change speak – Impact Assessments, Comms, Stakeholders, Best Practice and then a bit of Professional Services, DVC, HESA for completeness – all useful, all necessary, but often missing the thing that moves people. That connects. That heals.

It took me years, and no small amount of ongoing unlearning, to realise: we cannot build better systems while pretending to be people we're not.

My work in change has often been about shaping organisations to ready and deliver big student system transformation, it's about org structures, skills, plans, processes and shaping environments for people to deliver good change, human change.

But I've come to see that surface-level "change" work can still replicate the very dynamics we're trying to disrupt.

We smooth the edges, make the language palatable, produce another action plan.

Meanwhile, the unspoken things – pain, fatigue, silencing, complicity – continue under the surface.

Honesty, when centred, disrupts that surface, ultimately risking overall change success. But honesty in good change unlocks that which is relational.

I'm thinking here about the matriarchal models I've been exploring – not as a simple swap of leadership styles, but as a deep questioning of how we value and relate to one another.

In many matriarchal systems, decision-making is embedded in care. Power moves through relationships. It's not hoarded, it's held collectively. That challenges the default norms of many organisations I've worked in,

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Power in matriarchal systems moves through relationships. It's not hoarded, it's held collectively.

- Kanika Selvan



where hierarchy and detachment are often mistaken for professionalism.

Imagine a workplace where care wasn't an afterthought but a starting point. Where we didn't just include people in structures, but reimagined the structures themselves through the lens of relationality. Where honesty wasn't something to be managed but something to be honoured. That's not soft – that's radical.

And it changes organisations and change practice itself, it's everything. I've seen what happens when we create the conditions for that kind of honesty.

In one space I facilitated, we began by naming what we were bringing into the room with a check in – fear, hope, resistance, grief. It changed the team dynamic immediately. People weren't performing roles; they were arriving as themselves.

And from there, the real change work could begin. But it's not easy. Being honest in these systems can make you feel exposed.

*Especially if you're racialised, marginalised, or hold an identity that means you are expected to "keep the peace."*

*There's a cost to honesty. And there's a cost to silence. I've learned to be honest about that, too. There are still days when I catch myself reverting to the language of compromise, when I sense the discomfort in the room and instinctively fill it with reassurance. But I try now to pause. To sit with it. To let the discomfort do its work.*

*Because discomfort can be data. And honesty can be design.*

*So this is what I'm holding: change isn't just about doing new things. It's about being in new ways with each other. About cultivating relationships where truth can land, be heard, be held... not just once, but ongoingly.*

*Honesty doesn't scale neatly. It's messy, relational, human. But that's where change lives. And I think it's time.*

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Discomfort can be data.  
And honesty can be  
design.

- Kanika Selvan

## About Kanika

With experience in delivering digital technologies through strategic transformation programmes, Kanika Selvan is a highly motivated and resilient technical change leader. She has worked across multiple sectors, from energy retail and telecoms to higher education, housing associations, social enterprises, tech start-ups and small charities, adapting to different workplace cultures, drivers and practices.



# 9 COMMON FALLACIES IN CHANGE

Use this as a mirror: which of these fallacies might be quietly shaping your change work?



## **IF WE BUILD IT, THEY WILL COME**

Assumes implementation equals adoption



## **THE TOP-DOWN MAGIC WAND**

Authority alone can't drive transformation



## **THE SILVER BULLET SYNDROME**

No single solution fixes everything



## **BLAME THE RESISTORS**

Resistance often signals legitimate concerns



## **NO NEWS IS GOOD NEWS**

Silence often masks problems



## **EVERYONE THINKS LIKE US**

Diverse perspectives matter



## **SUCCESS BY METRICS ALONE**

Numbers don't tell the full story



## **THE LINEAR PROGRESS FALLACY**

Change is messy, not linear



## **CHANGE IS A ONE-TIME EVENT**

Real change is continuous



# THESE THREE WORDS

As we continue to build and nurture a community that embraces open dialogue, trust, and collaboration, three key values stood out as essential to change success from our April Change H.E. Conversation: **Integrity**, **Humility**, and **Evolutionary**.

These values do more than guide us through the challenges we face in change management in higher education.

They are foundational to shaping a culture that is **resilient**, **authentic**, and **constantly evolving**. By embodying these principles, we create a space where individuals feel empowered to contribute, learn, and grow together.

## INTEGRITY

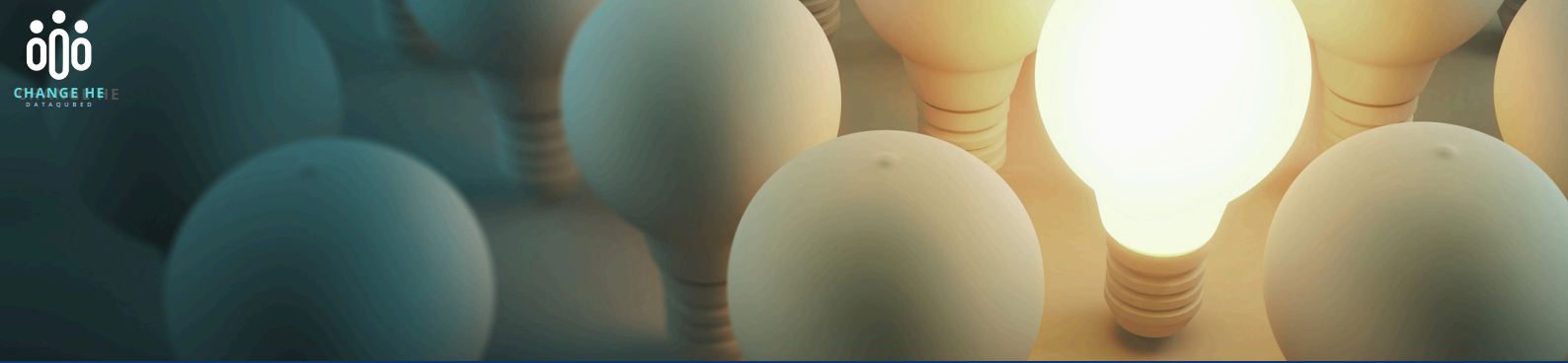
Integrity means more than just honesty; it's about being accountable to ourselves and our colleagues. In the world of change management, integrity is crucial for fostering trust. It encourages transparency, authenticity, and consistency, ensuring that the commitments made are ones we can stand by, even when the going gets tough. Embracing integrity within the community strengthens our ability to face challenges head-on, knowing that our actions align with our values.

## HUMILITY

Humility is the foundation of continuous learning and growth. By embracing humility, we allow ourselves to recognize our limitations, admit mistakes, and learn from them. It encourages a culture where everyone's voice is valued, and where acknowledging what we don't know becomes a pathway to discovering new insights. In a community driven by change, humility ensures that we stay open to new ideas and perspectives, creating a space where collaboration thrives.

## EVOLUTIONARY

The journey of change is never static. It's evolutionary. This value embodies the idea that progress isn't about achieving perfection, but about constantly evolving, adapting, and improving. Whether it's refining processes, growing leadership skills, or finding better ways to engage stakeholders, an evolutionary mindset helps us move forward with intention. In a landscape as dynamic as higher education, this adaptability is key to ensuring long-term success and sustained transformation.



## END NOTE: COURAGE & CONTINUITY

In this issue, we explored honesty - not the easy kind that's polished and palatable, but the kind that takes courage. The kind that surfaces when someone in a meeting says, "We don't know how to do this yet," or "This system isn't working for us," or simply, "We're tired."

What we heard from Change H.E. participants wasn't just commentary - it was truth-telling. Their words (some captured below) are a reminder: honesty in change isn't just a personal trait - it's a discipline we practice in teams, meetings, and cultures. It's how real change gets traction.

At Change H.E., we don't ask people to bring their best face. We ask them to bring their real voice. That's how we build a movement - one truth at a time. So let's keep the conversation going and we invite you to join us next time - <https://change-he.kit.com/859df19c9d>

Transparency - this is not always forthcoming from senior management

- Zeeshan Amjad, Head of Student Systems Development, University of Bedfordshire

You can't judge change maturity if you don't know what change maturity looks like

- Matt Etchell-Jones, Transformation Programme Manager

Sometimes resilience is used to put the responsibility of progress on the people that are breaking

- Kylie McCarroll, Operations Manager, University of Bedfordshire

There's a degree of arrogance in HE leadership when it comes to planning and prioritising change

- Business Change Professional in UK University

# CHANGE H.E. CHUCKLE



## 20 MAY CHANGE H.E. CONVERSATION



### The Transformative Power of Good UX/UI

**JAMIE ARCHER**

Principal Ux/UI Designer - Oracle



Don't miss future  
Change H.E. Conversations



Want to hear from someone in particular in higher education and their take on change in the sector?

Have an idea for a future Change H.E. Conversation?

Contact [change@dataqubed.com](mailto:change@dataqubed.com)