

## Tools for Change: Working with Royal Mail

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*“We need to hardwire the emotional into project plans”*  
(From Picturing 2011 Future State Workshop, Royal Mail 19 June 2008)

### [It all started when...]

Through its ‘Transformation for Change’ project, Royal Mail is aiming to update and improve both the technology it uses and the services it offers to customers. As with any organisation, however, designing and sending a co-ordinated and consistent message that invites everyone to engage presents a significant challenge. Royal Mail has over 150,000 employees and an obligation to deliver messages to the 27 million addresses in the UK; the number of groups and locations involved and the difficulty of creating a cohesive and constructive response on such a large scale magnifies this challenge. Through a series of carefully crafted events, Sparknow has helped Royal Mail to identify issues that might block the path towards transformation and address perceptions and attitudes towards change.

*“What we looked at in the workshops could really help us develop the project as a whole - how we take it into the future.”*

*Participant from workshop 10 April 2008*

### [And then...]

In April 2008, Sparknow was approached by Royal Mail to help find a way to construct a believable and compelling picture for change. Work had already been done to build a detailed factual picture of the future lives of people at Royal Mail. Now they needed to put some flesh on those bones.

Through a series of workshops, groups of participants were asked to develop



*Picturing ‘a day in the life of’*

and then put themselves into the shoes of a front-line worker.

These characters provided a fresh perspective; by getting beneath the surface of the official plans participants could start to think imaginatively about the emotional and practical impact on the lives of different types of workers.

The narrative and characterisation exercises could then be used to think about how to communicate messages on a large scale in a way that presents the individual benefits of change and get participants imagining the impact of that change instead of just talking about it.

*“It was great to get away from the everyday working environment, to really step back from your own point of view and have a look at someone else’s perspective on things.”*

*Participant from workshop 10 April 2008*

Once the different impacts of change had been considered, the characters then began to interact using verbal and non-verbal communication.

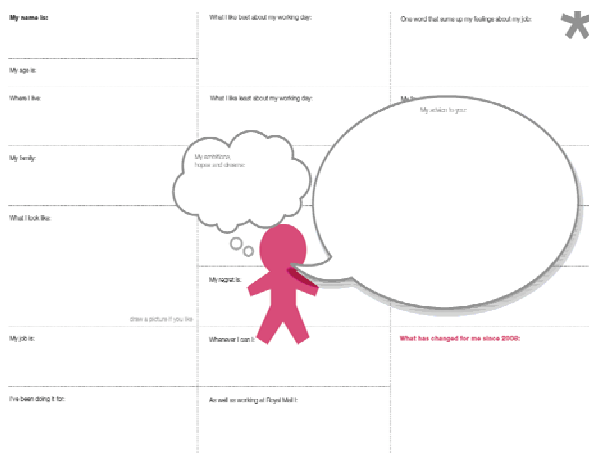
As participants got further into the characters' mindsets, they began to figure out ways of painting a picture of change in a way that made fictional workers feel included and looked after rather than defensive and reluctant to change.

Change management can be a serious business although humour was found to be an important ingredient in getting below the surface of issues and exploring it profoundly yet playfully.

*"A memorable moment for me was... the 6ft tall, blonde, blue eyed female postal worker created and then enacted by a group of men."*

*Participant from workshop 10 April 2008*

The workshops gave those involved an opportunity to think creatively about possible impacts and solutions, whilst the development of characters gave a sense of immediacy and 'realness' to those characters.



The worksheet is a grid with various prompts for character development. A pink stick figure character is positioned in the center, with a thought bubble above it. A large speech bubble is to the right of the character. A blue asterisk icon is in the top right corner of the grid.

My name is:	What I like best about my working day:	One word that sums up my feelings about my job:
My age is:	What I like least about my working day:	My job is to:
Where I live:	My ambitions, hopes and dreams:	My hobbies:
My family:	draw a picture of you/it:	What has changed for me since 2008:
What I look like:	Wherever I go I:	As well as working at Royal Mail I:
My job is:		
I've been doing it for:		

*Character development worksheet*

By putting themselves into a 'day in the life' of a future front-line Royal Mail

worker, participants began to ask themselves questions. How would a delivery driver feel about his route being changed? How would a mail centre operator view a change in work hours? What would a delivery postman think about new health and safety regulations?



*Character profile of a delivery postman*

Instead of thinking about the organisation as a whole, they began to investigate behind the scenes of the 'Transformation for Change' project in search of a human face.

*"During the second workshop, there were a lot of 'penny-dropping' moments: people began to realise the impact of decisions on the lives of our people"*

*Paula Hobbs-Shoulder, Senior Internal Communications Manager, Royal Mail.*

At the end of each workshop, participants were asked, from their own personal perspective to consider, what are all the changes and what can be done to bring those changes about constructively and positively.

Sparknow created a framework on which participants could hang ideas and discussions, whilst the participants themselves took what they had learned and created detailed and specific pieces of personal advice to take away at the end of each session.

One person, when describing how shifting perspective made them feel, even quoted from Bob Dylan's 'Positively 4<sup>th</sup> street':

*"I wish that for just one time  
You could stand inside my shoes  
And just for that one moment  
I could be you  
Yes, I wish that for just one time  
You could stand inside my shoes  
You'd know what a drag it is  
To see you"*

### [And what we'll do next is...]

*"We want to give managers a new language to work with".  
Member of Sparknow*

The events run by Sparknow have put the 'Transformation for Change' project into the perspective of the end user. Sparknow will continue to work collaboratively with Royal Mail during the next phase of the project, unlocking doors to open communication.

The small, facilitated experience of the workshops, will now be taken and adapted to suit managerial staff, who are far from the centre of operations but under a constant pressure to receive and deliver messages going in both directions. They need the confidence to open up spaces for constructive but often challenging group discussion.

Not necessarily a standard 'manual' as such, it will still equip managers with props, exercises and strategies for effective communication.

*"Why do people walk into an office and feel that they have to change the way they talk? We need to make them comfortable to use everyday language not business speak"*

*Paula Hobbs-Shoulder, Senior Internal Communications Manager, Royal Mail.*

The scale of the project is challenging and exciting for both organisations as they work towards providing every worker at every level with a positive, frank picture of the future of Royal Mail.

### [About Sparknow...]

Sparknow is a knowledge and communication consultancy founded ten years ago to bring some warmth back into the workplace. We specialise in unearthing useful truths that were almost known but not quite expressed.

We work with people who are undergoing changes, mergers, moves and rebranding, who are re-evaluating their position in the market and their future directions, or reconnecting to their staff. We often challenge people but we always respect them. The work expresses itself in different forms.

There's more on the Sparknow website [www.sparknow.net/approach](http://www.sparknow.net/approach) but what it boils down to is getting lively conversations going, conversations that allow questions - sometimes difficult ones - to be asked in new ways. Fresh, vivid conversation spaces are spaces for change.

To find out more about Royal Mail's 'Transformation of Change' project, contact Paula Hobbs-Shoulder, Senior Internal Communications Manager, Operations strategy and major change at Royal Mail:  
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