1 Introduction

The Challenge of Perceiving Change

[I]f we wanted to change others, we would first have to change ourselves. And to change ourselves effectively, we first have to change our own perceptions.
Covey (1989)

1.1 Introduction

Leading change is an inherently complex endeavour and requires an understanding of the emotional and self-contradictory human aspects of coping with transition. The motives of employees who want change are very much like the motives of other employees who are moved to do the opposite and hang on to what they have. Whether an individual is inspired by these motives to agitate for reform or to stand fast on the status quo is determined by a person's position in, and perceptions of, what is going on in his or her surroundings (Kaufman 1971). In short, every leader of change or interventionist as we call it in this book will be confronted with innovators and adapters as well as with defenders of the same change initiative. Whatever their position, the best plans will go awry when employees are not helped to actively engage in a process of exchanging their perceptions (Farr-Wharton and Brunetto 2007; Neves and Caetano 2006). First of all, involving employees is essential for change effectiveness (Bridges 2003). Secondly, this means that we need to face contradictory human aspects as they are. Therefore, for change to be embraced by all involved, interventionists must be skilled in organising a process that deals with arising contradictory human tensions (Wolf 2015).

In this first chapter, we explore the specific challenges and assumptions behind the above statements. In doing so, we will introduce and explore the following:

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- A short introduction of some of the main differences between a ‘positivist’ and a ‘postmodern’ worldview, followed by the introduction of the premises underlying a ‘social constructionist’ perspective as being the main paradigm of this book.
- Three business cases, introducing the nature of the challenge of engaging people in change. Augmenting the need to include the interventionist and his or her assumptions in the process and therefore the need for a different change paradigm.
- The challenge of perceiving and conceiving change. Augmenting that change management is an oxymoron and that organisational change is an intertwined process that takes place on an individual level and at the same time on a more collaborative level.
- A leadership’s guide to varying complex contexts. Augmenting the importance of making sense of the context of change by diagnosing the perceived complexity, interrelated human patterns and their ‘current reality’.
- A framework with an overview of three different interrelated theoretical approaches: social constructionism, systems thinking and complexity science.

We start this chapter by describing what it means to look at change and to intervene from a social constructionist perspective. After this we introduce three business cases. With these cases we want to stress that the challenges that today’s leaders and employees face when confronted with organisational change are not necessarily problems that come down to merely ‘resistance’ of others. In Paragraph 1.4, we aim to deconstruct the way we look at change management, change and organisational change. Changing organisations is not about changing a simple machine but about changing complex social systems, which in itself is seldom a linear endeavour. We take this a step further in Paragraph 1.5, where we will discuss paradox and complexity and introduce the pivotal role of feedback. The chapter closes with some reflections, a recap of the main findings and some key discussion points.

1.2 Introducing a Social Constructionist Perspective on Change

As a field, ODC began in the 1950s as organisation development (OD) and in its origins is based on insights from traditional scientific disciplines such as psychology, sociology and anthropology. Later, during the 1980s, OD integrated insights from management and business studies and became a more interdisciplinary field, just like—and overlapping with—hybrid fields such as organisation sciences, organisational behaviour, strategic management and the upcoming field of change management and management consulting. As a result, it became known as the field of organisational development and change (ODC). Since the 2000s, ODC and, in a broader sense, the social sciences as a whole, have experienced ‘a relational turn’. Specifically, it is no longer perceived as possible to successfully apply positivist scientific assumptions based on physical science to the study of human relationships.

Instead, we should aim to create a social science focused on its 'generative capacity', that is, a capacity to challenge our guiding assumptions, to foster reconsideration of what is 'taken for granted' and thereby furnish new alternatives for social actions (Gergen 1978). This is one of the reasons why scholars in the social sciences started to question their 'objective' and reductionist assumptions as well as their focus on the 'individual' or the 'organisation' as the basic unit of analysis (Chidiac 2018).

Recently, the broadening of the ODC field together with the development of new theoretical insights and intervention techniques have led to a contrast between the traditional, positivist roots of the field and more contemporary, postmodern **assumptions** of how to engage people in change. In general, the positivist paradigm is based on the assumption that there is one objective reality out there (to be measured), in contrast to the postmodernist paradigm, which is based on the assumption that there is an intersubjective reality (to be co-constructed).

Assumptions are general frames of insight that determine how we understand the world and how we translate that understanding into action. There are myriad other terms for these internal frames such as 'schemas', 'mental models' or 'scripts'. They can become so deeply ingrained that they are accepted as the truth and function as a human being's navigation system with which we 'see' the world—not in terms of our visual sense of sight, but in terms of perceiving, understanding and interpreting (Walsh 1995).

Translating a postmodern worldview to a theory-based approach to organisational development and change means that we need to address a richer and more nuanced picture of what is going on in the contemporary field of ODC. We attempt to do this by approaching change management, organisational development, organisational learning and change dynamics from an overarching postmodern, **social constructionist perspective**.

Social constructionism can be seen as a broad philosophy about relationships and the way people co-construct their reality within these relationships. Scholars and practitioners in sociology, psychology and communication sciences who work from this **perspective** examine mainly the development of jointly constructed understandings of the world as a means of change.

Given that it concerns the main perspective in this book, it appears necessary to ensure an understanding of what we mean by social constructionism. Therefore, we simply seek to identify some background and common tenets apparent in this work. In terms of background, social constructionism has roots in symbolic interactionism (Mead 1934) and phenomenology (Schutz 1970), but it was with Berger and Luckman's (1966) *The Social Construction of Reality* (Berger and Luckman 1966) that it really took hold. More than six decades later, a considerable amount of theory

and research subscribe to the basic tenet that people make their social and cultural worlds at the same time as these worlds make them (Gibeau et al. 2020; Wåhlin-Jacobsen 2020; Kopaneval and Sias 2015). A social constructionist perspective brings to the fore social processes that are 'simultaneously playful and serious, by which reality is both revealed and concealed, created and destroyed by our activities' (Pearce 1995; Cronen 2001). Social constructionists also assume that reality is not some objectifiable truth waiting to be uncovered; rather, they perceive that there can be multiple realities at the same moment in time that compete for truth and legitimacy. Furthermore, they believe that these realties are constructed through social interaction, in which meanings are negotiated, negotiated order is formed and contestation is possible (Fairhurst and Grant 2010). A social constructionist view shows us how meanings that are produced and reproduced on an ongoing basis create structures that are both stable and yet open to change, as interactions evolve over time (Giddens 1984). As argued, for example, by Gioia, we act as if these structures are real, but in fact they are (intersubjectively) produced phenomena (Gioia 2003).

Given its emphasis on social interaction, it is not surprising that social constructionism recognises the fundamental role of language and communication (Barge and Little 2002). Such a realisation has contributed to the linguistic turn and, more recently, the turn to discourse theory (Alvesson and Kärreman 2000). As a result, researchers in the social sciences have turned to constructionist approaches, and, with this perspective's ascendancy, there has been a greater focus on communicative issues. Therefore, looking at change from a social constructionist perspective means that we view reality as multilayered and as continuously socially negotiated. Seen from this perspective, changing people within their daily contexts means that we are focused on how they subjectively perceive their social surroundings and how they (inter)act accordingly. In the scientific literature, this way of looking at reality and how to change it assumes varied forms,[1] based on the following premises (Fairhurst and Grant 2010; Van Nistelrooij and Sminia 2010; Burr 1995; Shotter 2005; Crotty 1998; Hacking 1999; Harre 1986; Potter 1996; Gergen 1999, 2001):

1. Humans perceive reality through their senses. Consequently, any statement about how people perceive reality is idiosyncratic, but not necessarily non-real in its consequences.
2. Therefore, a so-called 'objective' reality is elusive for people, and, to the extent that a reality exists, it is a multilayered co-construction that is continuously socially negotiated and hence exists in a constant dynamic equilibrium.
3. Knowledge about how and why humans act, learn and change as they do is culturally specific and therefore contextual.

[1]In some publications, the authors have drawn a distinction between constructivism and constructionism—the former being more individual and cognitive and the latter being more social and interactive (Hoffman 1992).

Based on these premises, we can assume that:

1. People construct meaning among themselves because of their day-to-day interactions to understand what is going on.
2. Changing people in their daily routine is something that can be best realised through their direct participation and active involvement.
3. People's daily social surroundings are to be seen as a frame of reference that has been produced through past interactions, influencing ongoing interactions and changes because of the novel meanings generated.
4. Human learning and changing are related to the quality of the ways in which people interact, and with the relevance of their conversation partners with regard to the purpose of their interactions.

These premises have been reworked in, for example, system theory (Watzlawick et al. 1967), leadership theory (Fairhurst and Grant 2010) and are applied in professional fields such as psychotherapy, pedagogy and mediation (Warhus 2001; Watzlawick 1990; Wortham 2001; Winslade and Monk 2000). Within organisation sciences, and especially organisational change, these premises have only been used relatively recently (Van Nistelrooij and Sminia 2010).

When we intervene from a social constructionist perspective, we relate ourselves directly to 'what is going on' in the way relevant others perceive this themselves. The reason for this is relatively simple: '[I]f you want to know where you want to be, begin finding out where you are.' (Bate 1994) In this way, we generate directly practical knowledge (Susman and Evered 1978). As one of the leading English scholars in the field of social constructionism, Kenneth Gergen wrote:

> Social constructionist inquiry is principally concerned with explicating the processes by which people come to describe, explain or otherwise account for the world (including themselves) in which they live (Gergen 1985).

That is why, concepts such as dialogue and **co-inquiry** (Torbert 2000) have a major role in doing social constructionist research.

> **Co-inquiry** is an abbreviation of 'collaborative inquiry', in which the participants work together as co-researchers and as co-research subjects. The participants, including the interventionist(s), research a topic through their own experience of it in order to understand their world, make sense of their life, develop new and creative ways of looking at things and learn how to act to change things they might want to change and find out how to do things better (Heron and Reason 2008). As a form of action research, the 'co' is also about being 'cooperative' by introducing an issue that is related to their shared change purpose.

In contrast to a positivist scientific paradigm whose focus is entirely on truths in the 'out there' world, social constructionism has a focus on awareness and inquiry into the present relationships among the 'in here', subjective world and the 'among us', interactional world (Reason and Torbert 2001). So, a social constructionist perspective is directly related to 'what is going on' in the real world. Thus, it opens up more possibilities for seeing emerging differences and disturbances and appraising them together, collaboratively creating space and new insights. Viewed in this way, change is an emergent phenomenon, always happening where people interact with each other. Basically, embracing organisational change from a social constructionist perspective means that we want to find out what is happening by focusing on generating feedback with a constant awareness of the communicated values, beliefs and assumptions.

1.3 Introducing the Three Main Business Cases in this Book

When change has been introduced in an organisation, we can expect several forces that can drive individuals in all kinds of directions. Consequently, a change initiative can lead to lots of initial enthusiasm and an intense and widespread sense of involvement, unlocking lots of energy. However, when not properly facilitated, managed and enacted, things can become needlessly complex. To illustrate this, we will briefly present some contemporary examples in which all those directly involved initially expressed a lot of involvement. However, as the process continues, everything seems to get cluttered, and in the final analysis, nothing has changed. We shall return in more detail to these cases throughout the book.

1.3.1 The First Case: A Lot of Sense But No Impact in a Labour Union

For a union to be successful, it is important to have enough members who are satisfied with the services offered by the union representatives. Confronted with a continuous decrease in the number of members over the last 3 years, a business manager of a union expected the employees to become more accountable in delivering union services, recruiting members and realising strategic targets over the next 2 years. In several interactive sessions, union leaders and managers discussed the urgency of these measures and searched for ways to implement them. After 2 years, it became clear that nothing had changed for the better; in fact, nothing had happened at all, and members were still leaving the union in substantial numbers. It became clear that in a worst-case scenario, there would be no union members left. But what could be done? All those involved were aware of the urgency of the situation. Everybody was eager to do something and really wanted to change the way the union operated. But instead of pulling together to cope with the serious challenges the union faced at that time, people went about their work in their own idiosyncratic ways, did not find ways to act collaboratively and, in fact, worked against each

other's ideas for change. In this case, from a managerial point of view, the union leaders' behaviours could be labelled as a display of 'resistance'. However, the union leaders themselves felt that their behaviours were a display of their genuinely felt sense of 'ownership'. In other words, what was regarded by management as 'resisting' could also be interpreted as 'being involved'. The union leaders regarded the labelling of 'resisting' by their management as an act of disrespect that reduced their own involvement. Interlocked as their mutual perceptions and behaviours were, the whole process became a **self-fulfilling prophecy**: the behaviours of all involved, those of union leaders and managers alike, came down to resisting each other's suggestions.

Self-Fulfilling Prophecy starts with a false definition (or pseudo explanation) of a situation evoking a new behaviour that makes the originally false conception come true. The specious validity of the self-fulfilling prophecy perpetuates a reign of error as the prophet will cite the actual course of events as proof that he was right from the very beginning (Merton 1968).

Based on this short description, the following observations can be made regarding the first business case. First, it seems to illustrate that the challenges that today's leaders and employees face when confronted with organisational change are not necessarily problems that come down to merely 'resistance'.[2] Second, this case also illustrates that organisational change is not a simple, **linear and sequential process** in which change is realised in a programmed progressive way. What someone perceives as an 'effect' may be a 'cause' for others, and vice versa.

[2]Which is in most cases, especially in the case of the labour union, a pseudo explanation.

Linear and **sequential change**, since the 1950s the dominant mindset concerning organisational change, can be described as largely programmatic, initiated on a 'top-down' basis: the need for change is identified and the plans for the implementation are developed by (top) management and then cascaded down through the organisation. Basically, it is a mindset that sees change implementation as employing clearly defined succeeding interventions with the idea that the outcome of each intervention (Aitken and Higgs 2010) can be predicted beforehand.

Third, the case of the labour union also seems to illustrate that human perceptions play a much more pivotal role than we may believe. This brings us to the idea that the challenge may be more about establishing, with all those involved, what it is that they are doing, to obtain a shared picture of their **current reality**, than about trying to change their behaviour. Establishing such a shared image of what is happening helps in 'know[ing] what we are doing' (Tsoukas 2005) in the here and now and is about finding **common ground**.

A **'current reality'** refers to the here and now of a given situation; it also refers to a way of diagnosing, with multiple stakeholders, a so-called differential diagnosis. This process is intended to help all those involved gain an understanding of what is going on in a situation they want to improve. By diagnosing a given situation from multiple (subjective) perspectives, all those involved are creating a shared and enriched picture of what is going on—which functions as a **common ground**. This in general is a state that involves positive affect, a sense of connection to others, transcendence and common purpose (Kinjerski and Skrypnek 2004).

In short, when we perceive things as 'not my problem', or as being different and separate when they are in fact interrelated, we tend to make things much more complex than they already are. For most of us, when we find ourselves in complex situations, it seems impossible to react in a straightforward and consistent way. It is more likely, just as happened in this first case, that people are simultaneously 'pushing the gas and hitting the brakes'. This is similar to what we might do when driving a car, i.e. spin around in a circle, producing a lot of noise and smoke, but never moving an inch forward.[3]

[3] A phenomenon that has all the ingredients of a particular story in Lewis Carroll's well-known novel *Through the Looking Glass*, in which the Red Queen (one of the famous characters) tries to run as fast as she can around a tree to stay in the same place.

In Interlude 6.3 in Chap. 6, we have another, more in-depth example of this union case when we discuss learning processes at different levels.

1.3.2 The Second Case: Being Stuck in a Business University

A business university specialising in offering MBA education and in-company management development programmes had just survived severe cutbacks in which half of the staff lost their jobs. In the following months, the remaining employees, who successfully applied for their current upgraded jobs, did not seem to manage their daily challenges and opportunities after the restructuring. In fact, they did not seem to cope at all. After more than 6 months of unproductive behaviour and internal dissatisfaction, the CEO decided that something drastic had to be done. Therefore, he hired an external specialist who started with a series of individual interviews. The interviews showed that everybody was aware of the urgent financial situation and that most employees were struggling with impressions and perceptions of how things had gone during the cutbacks and the following period of reapplication as instigated and directed by the CEO. Despite all this, most employees seemed to know exactly what had to be done. During a **collaborative dialogue session** based on **large-group intervention** techniques, the problems, results and suggestions for the follow-up were discussed and validated with the entire staff. Although there was much agreement on the main points, there was a lack of agreement on the specifics. To cope with this, a procedure was agreed upon with the works council. The outcomes would give the CEO clear and specific advice about what to do. He copy-pasted this advice and presented it back to the works council. However, to his surprise, the works council gave a negative advice, disapproved of his proposals and questioned his ability to implement the decisions. This led to new disputes within the organisation and the whole process came to a halt (again).

A **collaborative dialogue session** is a dialogue or an open, equal and reciprocal conversational exchange of personal perspectives between two or more people. A collaborative dialogue session exceeds the size of a small group and starts with a minimum of 40 participants. **Large-group intervention** techniques are based on the organisation development intervention methodology developed between the late 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s.

Again, what we see here is an example of people who were involved as much as possible, under the condition of substantial cutbacks and serious consequences for

everyone involved. And just like the first example, we can view the behaviours of the people involved as ‘resisting’ but also as a display of a genuinely felt ‘**sense of urgency**’.

> Creating ‘**a sense of urgency**’ generally refers to communicating to members of the organisation that it’s imperative to act promptly, decisively and without delay. One of the three underlying assumptions behind this concept is that if you cannot persuade someone to act the moment the information is received, change won’t happen at all. Secondly, a failure to act promptly means that opportunities may be lost, and ultimately this will negatively affect the financial health of the company. Thirdly, and more generally, complacency is the enemy of progress and change.

Because there were several contradictory perspectives involved in the business university, it became extremely difficult to come to a shared sense of what was going on and what has to be done under these ambiguous circumstances. In this case, the whole process ends up in what seems to be a typical **catch-22** situation in which the only solution is denied by a colleague’s vision about what has to be done, which is as ‘true’ and well-motivated as that of our own. In these kinds of ambiguous contexts, we find ourselves in a blurry situation, not being able to name or see the contradiction itself; we are involved, feel committed and know that our jobs are on the line, but eventually we ask ourselves how much responsibility we need to display to be heard and to overcome this mess.

> The term “**catch-22**” was coined in 1961 by Joseph Heller in his novel of the same name and refers to a problematic situation for which the only solution is denied by a circumstance inherent in the problem. A catch-22 is a paradoxical situation from which there is no escape because it involves mutually conflicting or dependent conditions, for example, “How am I supposed to gain experience if I am constantly not hired because I don’t have experience?”

In Sect. 7.2.4 and in Interlude 7.5 in Chap. 7, we have more in-depth examples of this case when we discuss feedback loops and paradoxical processes, respectively.

1.3.3 The Third Case: The Dance Around the Symbolic Totem Pole in a Healthcare Organisation

In order to make the just merged healthcare organisation more cost-efficient and their tactical decisions more effective, the two-headed board of directors decided to remove the second echelon of regional executive managers and regroup the locations. This resulted in an organisation with approximately 850 employees, who together attend to 2500 clients, and 40 executive (staff and location) managers divided over 8 different municipalities and 25 locations. With the regional managers out of the way, the board of directors now had short hierarchical 'lines', with the location and staff executives assigning them tactical and strategical tasks directly. However, after several years, these structural changes and new ways of working did not add up. In fact, the staff and location executives did not seem to execute their tactical assignments at the right time, with the right quality, or worse, with the much-needed impact on the organisation. When interviewed individually, the majority of the executives indicated that the new structure did not motivate them to engage with one another. The monthly board meeting, with the whole tactical unit of 40 people, was not only 'too much too little', but also, according to the interviewees, 'all one-way traffic with only the chair's points'. However, most awkwardly, none of the interviewees wanted to discuss their dissatisfaction publicly. As a result, their experiences were not shared and there seemed to be fatigue with regard to dealing with the same problems time and again. This came out during a first collaborative dialogue session based on large-group intervention techniques with a critical mass of 250 organisation members, leading to follow-up collaborative dialogical meetings with smaller groups of up to 40–50 participants focused on some of the issues brought forward. Although the whole organisation seems to be moving and little things really seem to be picked up now, the 'frustrating board meetings' never did, which seemed to prevent the 'tactical' whole from implementing significant changes. Thus, the board meetings became a symbolic totem pole that everyone kept dancing around, and sometimes inadvertently kicked, leading to the frustration of all those involved, who resigned themselves in silence.

In Interlude 7.4 in Chap. 7, and in the final chapter, we introduce a more in-depth example of this healthcare case as we go into a personal narrative.

1.3.4 Some Thematising Reflections: Dealing with Dilemmas, Defensiveness and Polarisation

What the three different business cases show is that when confronted with organisational change, things can become unclear, less certain and even less safe and secure, creating all kinds of tensions. These tensions are feeling states, which are

often accompanied by anxiety, distress, discomfort or tightness in making choices (Putnam et al. 2016). In the above cases, tensions seem to increase every time the members of the organisation encounter a dilemma. As a point of distinction, dilemmas refer to either-or choices, in which one alternative must be selected from mutually attractive (or unattractive) and not necessarily incompatible options (Cameron and Quinn 1988). The occurrence of a dilemma in these cases seems to have something to do with the fact that people are stuck in an undesirable situation, one that renders them intrinsically motivated to change things for the better. However, at the same time they find themselves among colleagues who apparently do not agree with their vision and do not support their efforts to make the requisite change. In this way, the other represents a threat to one's identity and reality, circumstances that form a breeding ground for **dualism**, **duality** and/or **polarisation** in terms of distrust and opposition. However, at the same time, a self-conscious person needs to be seen and recognised by (the same) colleagues in order to maintain their sense of realness and (social) identity (Laing 1969). In such cases, the process can be recognised through the ways in which people constantly make distinctions in terms of 'we' versus 'they': in Case 1, the union leaders versus management; in Case 2, the employees versus the CEO; and in Case 3, the board members versus the executives.

Dualism refers to opposite poles, dichotomies, binary relationships or bipolar opposites. It lies at the heart of contradictions and paradoxes in that they set up bipolar relationships that often permeate dualities in the field (Janssens and Steyaert 1999), but these relationships are not necessarily incompatible or mutually exclusive. In contrast, **duality** refers to the interdependence of opposites that form a both-and relationship. With this concept, scholars are now addressing organisational complexity through embracing both poles simultaneously. Like the North Pole and the South Pole or the opposite ends of a magnet, poles represent extreme end points, and **polarisation** indicates movement towards those extremes.

Under the described conditions in the three cases people easily become defensive. Being defensive doesn't stimulate change and may even spur a negative reinforcing cycle (Smith and Berg 1987a). Such a reinforcing process makes people increasingly

want to stay out of the spotlight and distance themselves from what is happening. Moreover, in their ongoing struggle against uncertainty, insecurity and anxiety, people develop certain defence mechanisms. These can develop, often unconsciously, over time as a result of collusive interaction, appearing as a typical element of the culture of the group or even as a mode of functioning of the whole organisation (Jaques 1955). In other words, defence mechanisms tend to become an aspect of a daily reality with which all those involved must come to terms (Menzies-Lyth 1960). However, under the circumstances as described in the above cases, polarisation becomes a defence mechanism (if you are not with me, you are against me). Without proper interventions (see Interlude 1.1 for a definition of interventions), polarisation can lead to another, more intense defence mechanism: **splitting**. Polarisation and especially splitting contribute to further escalation, unstable relationships and intense emotional experiences (Carser 1979).

Splitting is a defence mechanism in which people have learned to think in terms of all or nothing (an individual's actions and motivations are all good or all bad with no middle ground), which seems to be the case, for example, in the perception of the employees of the functioning of the CEO in the second case. Splitting is something that can be recognised when people fail in their thinking to bring together the dichotomy of both positive and negative qualities of the self and others into a cohesive, realistic whole.

Interlude 1.1 Intervening, Sense Making and Sense Giving

Basically, an intervention is about relationships and interaction and can be seen as the act of inserting one thing between others. It is about one or more individuals acting in the affairs, situation and/or personal space of one or more other people. Most interventions are based on an expectation that a given intervention accomplishes a change in the intended direction by means of certain processes or structures that are built into the intervention or evoked by it (Bartunek et al. 2008). Cummings and Worley in their book on ODC, define interventions as 'a set of sequenced planned actions or events intended to help an organisation increase its effectiveness' (Cummings and Worley 2001). These authors see interventions as deliberate acts that disturb the status quo. Furthermore, Argyris, one of the leading academic authors in the field of ODC, defines intervening as 'entering into an ongoing relationship system, coming between or among persons, groups or objects for the purpose of helping them' (Argyris 1970). In conclusion, an intervention is about intervening in the affairs of a client's system with the purpose of introducing a difference.

Interventions are usually carried out in particular circumstances, which will influence the intent and the process of the intervention. Thus, the variation in

(continued)

Interlude 1.1 (continued)
particularities is infinite (Jönsson 2010). This makes the undertaking of intervening reasonably unique. A nice illustration of the need for attention to uniqueness is given by Chester Barnard, who in 1938 wrote one of the first management books on the functioning of executives. Issues that require a response from executives may arise from, for example, the novelty of conditions or raising intra-organisational differences. Barnard suggested calling such cases 'appellate cases' (Barnard 1938). Barnard's 'appellate cases' denote managerial executive situations where a problem is referred to a top management team for a decision because it is complex or controversial, and where the decision is expected to guide the development or learning processes of employees in emerging new practices. The decision and the follow-up in which the executive guides their fellow employees represent, according to Barnard, 'the most important test of his [or her] capacity' (Barnard 1938). Based on the executive's understanding of the situation, which depends upon their ability and initiative, and on the nature of the way in which it is communicated, it follows that the change will be embraced.

The way Barnard's 'appellate cases' are handled seems to have a lot in common with today's approach to decision-making and intervening when there is a need for change. When differences arise, new possibilities emerge, and things become ambiguous and more and more uncertain, it is expected that people at the top of the organisation will accept their responsibility and decide what to do. However, making decisions is as sense making and something completely different then communicating the sense of that decision to others (i.e. sense giving) that did not participate in the decision-making. 'Sense making' is part of decision-making and means sorting out the facts (as we perceive them) and giving them relevance and meaning (Weick 2001). Under ambiguous circumstances, there is the added problem that the relevant facts are not yet recognisable. To bring them forth under circumstances with emerging differences and disturbances, we need to insert our own agency and invite the commitment and help of others. This latter part is sense giving, which influences the meaning construction of others towards a redefinition or **reframing** of the current organisational reality.

According to Goffman, the concept of 'frame' is consciously used to recontextualise a problem (Goffman 1981). In the same vein, **reframing** as an activity can be conceptualised in general as 'chang[ing] the conceptual and or emotional setting or viewpoint in relation to which a situation is experienced and placing it in another frame that fits the "facts" of the same concrete situation equally well or even better, and thereby changes its entire meaning' (Watzlawick 1989).

Sense giving is thus ultimately concerned with inserting action—one's own and that of others—and is by definition a form of intervening. In conclusion,

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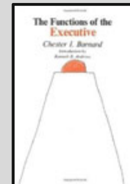
Interlude 1.1 (continued)
sense making must be accompanied by sense giving to give organisational members the opportunity to frame new sets of managerial acts (Kokk et al. 2012). Moreover, to bring about a possible and jointly desired future, sense giving is best done with the active involvement or participation of those who are supposed to reframe their current sense of their organisational reality.

Chester Barnard (1886 - 1961)
Was an American business executive and the author of pioneering work in management theory and organizational studies. His landmark 1938 book, 'The Functions of the Executive', sets out a theory of organization and of the functions of executives in organizations.



Together, the three business cases emphasise the difficulty of aligning the different perspectives of all those involved to make progress as a whole. Insofar as the participants try to make sense of the decision and act coherently, significant change does not happen. Moreover, as these cases seem to illustrate, these kinds of processes are not exclusive to typical top-down change initiatives (Romanelli and Tushman 1994).

1.4 Introducing the Management of (Organisational) Change

In an increasingly complex world, organisations built on traditional assumptions of stability, equilibrium, alignment and predictability will increasingly be out of touch and ineffective. For example, as Lawler and Worley argue:

> Pursuing the latest management fad that is sold as a way to make organisations more efficient, more agile, more re-engineered or more whatever doesn't address the fundamental need for organisations to change more quickly and effectively (Lawler and Worley 2006).

In general, textbooks for courses such as organisational behaviour, management of organisations, organisational theory, and organisational development and change manifest a worldview based on reducing tension and complexity, with change introduced as an aberration in itself and organisational change as something that is manageable. However, it seems legitimate to ask ourselves whether organisational change is something that can be planned and controlled from the beginning until the end. Our answer is that no one is able to tell you beforehand whether changes will actually lead to the predefined objectives. Furthermore, we believe that the emphasis needs to be on the process of creating and maintaining 'change' capacity and helping people to get there. This is why we need to look for new language to help us move beyond the assumptions that are embedded in typical management books and that we currently hold ourselves in thinking about change, organisational change and change management.

1.4.1 Introducing Change Management

Traditionally, **change management** is presented as a temporary linear endeavour, based on a series of 'planned' cause-and-effect relationships in which an effect (the change) has a single cause (the intervention). Since Henri Fayol wrote his *Industrial and General Administration* in 1916 (Fayol 1930; Daft 1983; Rodrigues 2001), the general point of view has been that management is the art of planning, organising, leading, controlling and forecasting. In other words, managing implies consistency, efficiency and predictability, focusing on what is known. On the other hand, change implies disturbance, irrationality and moving into the unknown. Therefore, the term 'change management' is an oxymoron that lends a pseudoscientific aura to an activity that is rarely logical, frequently irrational and most definitely unpredictable (Lesormonde 2010).

With the suffix 'management', we seem to emphasise consistency and predictability and making 'what is known' more effective. With 'change' we seem to emphasise disturbance, irrationality and making things more effective by taking a step into 'the unknown'. Together they make **change management** an oxymoron, i.e. a phrase or statement that seems to say two opposite things, comparable with oxymorons like 'anarchy rules', 'exact estimate' and 'business casual' (McKinsey Global Survey 2006).

The label 'change management' not only creates a false yet comforting feeling of management control but can also be a necessity. We are talking about changing organisations, which as an activity, costs money and requires people's time and capacity. Change and keeping things running are not per se compatible, especially if we want people to be actively involved in the change process itself. Therefore, we assume that change activities need to be planned and plotted in a programme, preferable with a road map, with elaborate phasing and a detailed action plan, not least because it provides a suggestion of certainty and security about what is going to happen. Although such an action plan represents a model of reality, and in a sense is feasible, whether it is also accepted as such depends on how people perceive it as their reality. 'Reality' is not an absolute; it differs according to the individual and the group to which the individual belongs. However, neither the model nor the road map speaks for the 'reality' of others as Interlude 1.2 illustrates.

Interlude 1.2 Following a Wrong Map and Still Getting there (Barret 2012)

A group of Hungarian soldiers were hiking in the Austrian Alps and got lost. After wandering aimlessly for days, some had given up hope of being found, while others had resigned themselves to death—until, that is, one of the

(continued)

Interlude 1.2 (continued)
soldiers found a map in his pocket. He used the map to help his fellow soldiers get their bearings and feel comfortable that they were heading in a hopeful direction. Indeed, the group eventually did return safely. Only then did they realise that the map that saved their lives was of the Spanish Pyrenees mountains, not the Alps. According to Barrett, who heard this story from organisational theorist Karl Weick, the story demonstrates that we should not fall in love with strategic plans and that when we are lost and face a radically unfamiliar situation, any old map will do. That is, any plan will work because it will turn us into a learner by helping people to act and venture forth into the unknown mindfully. We take a few steps and then new pathways emerge as we discover what to do next. Having a map helped turn the soldiers into learners precisely because they were able to experiment; with each tentative path, they compared their progress to the map, and this comparison heightened their awareness. They became more mindful. The soldiers could see more features of the landscape that might have gone unnoticed. The Pyrenees map tracked a different range, but it served to orient the soldiers and gave them a temporary sense of confidence that there was enough structure within the chaos and a loose belief that if they started down the path, they would eventually find their way out of their dilemma. Acting turned them into learners. In short, act first as if this will work. Pay attention to what presents itself. Venture forth. Make sense of it later.

According to Weick the story is intended to shape our thinking about sense making, to serve as a—frame or—gestalt[4] for observing organisations, and while this is sometimes all he takes theory to be, what he calls—theorising.

As illustrated in Interlude 1.2, having a map gives a sort of false security that comforts and assures people that they are doing things in the 'right' way and things are 'under control as predicted'. Notions of control have been closely linked to notions of stability and equilibrium. These notions have major implications for the way we view change and our understanding of order, disorder and control. This means that in this regard, the opposite of 'planned change'; 'emerging change' is not per se an unsteady state of uncontrolled disorder but can also be seen as a steady state of unintended order (Mintzberg and Waters 1989). Mapping organisational change is a paradoxical activity: it is both needed for people to create a collectively sense of 'security' and 'certainty' and not needed because it leaves less room for emerging and more individual processes of sense making. Organisational change is predicated on dynamic movement, not simply on the management of this movement.

There are a lot of realistic and non-realistic assumptions underlying the activity of managing change, which, as scholars like By and his colleagues argue, are handled

[4]Gestalt is 'an overall picture', where the whole is more than the sum of the component parts (Weick 2004).

as ‘accepted truths’ and hinder the further development of how to realise change (By et al. 2016). A typical example of such an ‘accepted truth’ is the constant reference to the claim that 70% of all change initiatives fail. We do this despite the claim having been discredited almost a decade ago (Hughes 2011). Other examples of these typical thriving assumptions regarding the ‘management of change’ are:

1. Managers are not employees. Hence, we keep referring to perceived and often created ‘conflicts’ between management and non-management employees and by doing so we are supporting a confrontational ‘us and them’ stance and culture within organisations.
2. The outcomes of a change programme are clear; they are specified, prior to the inception of the programme. That makes that employees are seen as passive recipients of prescriptions for behaviour.
3. We need management to take the responsibility for realising change. Instead, we could also be focusing on the activity of leadership, changing organisations and human dynamics, which is much more of a shared responsibility.
4. ‘It goes without saying’ that change provokes ‘resistance’, which is why it is important for the change to succeed that ‘resistance’ is managed (Leybourne 2006).
5. Environmental turbulence contributes to the difficulties in planning organisational change, offering opportunities for more experimental and less structured approaches to change. Which means that ‘planning’, as a typical management skill becomes less important and ‘improvisation’ just more and more (Moorman and Miner 1998).

Change simply happens or is made to happen in places where people have the need to change their way of doing things and/or change the circumstances they are working in. This is exactly why experts in the field such as organisation guru Gary Hamel argue that when we start at the top, trying to gain commitment from management first, most change programmes are doomed to be ‘catch-up’ programmes (Garyhamel 2020). Trying to change an organisation in this way is, almost by definition, going to be too little too late, which means that when we are managing change as something that needs to be engineered and cascaded down through the organisation, we are in fact restricting emerging change.

1.4.2 Introducing Change

All definitions of change are problematic (Tichy 1983). This is because there seems to be an assumption that we humans can differentiate between states of change and stability. As organisations are always changing, sometimes in subtle and incremental ways, defining change turns out not to be so simple. Further, **change** is unlikely to be a single event that can be analysed in isolation and examined dispassionately, even in retrospect; rather, it develops over time and envelops those who experience it.

Change is an abstract, theoretical construct. In a more fundamental philosophical sense, it has something to do with *time* (no change without progress in time), *energy* (no change without any kind of movement), the same entity (no change as it is not the same entity), *perception* (no change when we are not aware of it) and *exchanging* our impressions (no change if we do not conceive or comprehend it by sharing our impressions with relevant others).

Although change at its most basic level has been said to consist of the stages of unfreezing, moving and refreezing, progress through these stages involves more than sequential activities and behaviours (Quinn and Kimberly 1984). It can also be said that the course of change is not bound by trend projection but is itself subject to change (Macdonald 1995). Or as Isabella argues – based on her in-depth case study:

> Transitions are themselves transitional. As they evolve, different emphases on a different combination of values and assumptions may be required. When a change is initiated, existing patterns are disrupted, and this results in a period of uncertainty and conflict. If key people accept and support the change, novelty turns to confirmation and eventually the innovation is routinised. As the process unfolds, managers are required to take on different orientations and styles (Isabella 1990).

As a change unfolds, different assumptions and orientations are required at different times in the process. All those involved (need to) undergo an alteration of the way they conceive the need to change, the process of changing and the maintenance of what has been changed. In other words, the perspective through which people view an event (i.e. a frame of reference)—shifts during an unfolding change process. To conceive is to form something in our mind or to develop an understanding of what we perceive. Logically, this means that conceiving is about comprehending and is preceded by perceiving. Apparently, to perceive is to become aware of something directly through our senses. Becoming aware is also a social process in which meaning emerges in the social act of gesture and response, where the gesture can never be separated from the response. Meaning does not lie in the gesture, the word, alone but in the gesture taken together with the response to it in a given context as one social act. For change to be perceived and conceived, we need to know 'what is going on' and make sense of it by exchanging our perceptions with relevant others. Therefore, we have to be aware of a lot of things altogether, at the same moment. In his lecture 'The Perception of Change' at Oxford in 1911, Nobel Prize winner Henri Bergson stated:

> The point is that usually we look at change, but we do not see it. We speak of change, but we do not think it. We say that change exists, that everything changes, that change is the very law of things. Yes, we say it and we repeat it, but those are only words and we reason and philosophise as though change does not exist (Bergson 1946).

Following the statement of Bergson, change is predominantly a perceptual phenomenon, understandable only in terms of individuals' accounts of definitions of a

situation. More basically, all knowing is rooted in sensing, feeling, thinking and attending to the experiential presence of us human beings in our world (Reason and Torbert 2001). However, we can rarely experience immediacy in a pure form and most of the time we make inferences about, and add meanings to, our immediate sense experience. That is why we live in a world mediated by meaning, which is constructed by the experiences, understandings, judgements and decisions that we have made alone and/or in groups in which we have learned to name things and to interpret them. This is what human perception is about and what makes it into an extraordinary phenomenon: it links people to themselves, to their environment and to the way in which they are connected with each other.[5]

1.4.3 Introducing Organisational Change

As the business cases show in the beginning of this chapter, changing organisations is not about changing a simple machine but about changing complex social systems, which in itself is seldom a linear endeavour. Clearly, we need another way of looking at organisational change that does capture the kind of ambivalence and circular movements people engage in when they are supposed to change their ways. A way of looking focused on the emerging human dynamics when people are encouraged, challenged and even forced to change their way of working and their situation without fully conceive the extent to which it is a solution to the daily problems that they experience. While increasing duality can lead to schisms during change, there is also the potential that efforts to engage in coexisting opposites will lead to movement. Movement can be defined as 'the exploration of new ground [and] the leaving of old patterns' (Smith and Berg 1987b). As introduced in the last section, movement is critical for change to happen and to be perceived. The question then is how can we achieve movement? One possibility is while individuals and groups are trying to cope with the **emergence** of differences, disruptions, disturbances, dissonance and duality.

Emergence is perhaps one of complexity science's most critical concepts. Emergence is about the perception of the new arising out of connections and contexts that were not perceived just moments before. Emergence can be characterised by the following key elements:

(continued)

[5]As a process, 'perception' is about sense making; it actively constructs rather than passively records 'reality' (Heuer Jr. 1999). Without any conscious effort, our perception determines our observations and interpretations. For example, we perceive matters that interest us better than things that do not interest us. The same is true for phenomena that are in our proximity and are less ambiguous, as we tend to perceive these better than the same phenomena that are in our periphery and are more ambiguous (Reis et al. 2011; Stephan et al. 2011). We see connections where none exist and perceive differences more easily than similarities.

- It is based on internally generated patterns.
- There is an absence of centralised control.
- No single part coordinates the macro-level behaviour of the whole.
- It uses only local dynamics.

Although emerging movement and change on an individual and group level can be seen as conditional for organisational change to happen, they are in itself not sufficient. Change on an organisational level means also that a critical mass, representative for the involved whole is trying to accommodate, and experiment with the individual and group learnings. However, **organisational change** is also about repeating and sharing what is learned, amplifying and making decisions in how to go on further.

Organisational change is an interactional process that takes place on two levels: first, and at its core, the microprocess of individual learning, and second, interconnected with the first, the collaborative process of exchange of the 'learnings' between people who are relevant for the change because of their stake in (not) realising it. The exchange process is conditional and at the same time supportive of the individual learning process, just as the latter is conditional and supportive of the collaborative exchange process.

To sum up, all organisational change begins with a status quo being disturbed, resulting in emerging differences, disruptions, disturbances and dissonance being perceived but not necessarily conceived. This means that our senses register that something different is going on without that we know what it means or foresee its consequences. The way we make sense of these disturbances is through developing a language that enables us to tease out useful distinctions. As the vocabulary to describe what is emerging becomes more familiar, our understanding increases (Holman 2010), providing room to challenge our assumptions. To sum up, organisational change is to be considered as a process that:

1. Has something to do with time, energy, focusing on the same entity, perception and exchanging our own perspective with relevant others.
2. Takes place on two interrelated levels: at a micro level as an individual process of learning to cope and on a more meso or macro level as a process of exchanging the 'learnings'.
3. Is evoked by emerging disturbances, disruptions and dissonance, which, from a certain point, involves a critical mass that is representative of the involved social whole.
4. Consists the exchange of various points of view (i.e. perspectives), stakes and possible opposing perspectives and forces with which participants actively try to make a different, more shared meaning out of their 'current reality'.

1.5 Introducing Paradox and Complexity

When people really believe that things are simple and that there is only one truth or reality, they tend to do the same thing over and over again. This may be a good course of action; it is proven effective and also efficient. However, this is only true in a simple context and as we discuss in this paragraph, when a situation becomes paradoxical and therefore more complicated, keep doing the same things is not making things simpler but even more complex.

1.5.1 Introducing Paradox

As first suggested by Eisenhardt (2000) in a special issue of the *Academy of Management Review* in 2000, vibrant organisations drive change (into the unknown) and continuity (keep performing in the known) through their ability to simultaneously hold the two states in a **paradox**. Eisenhardt asserts that this action is not simply finding a bland halfway point between the two extremes, but rather exploring and capitalising on its creative tension.

Paradox denotes 'contradictory yet interrelated elements—elements that seem logical in isolation but absurd and irrational when appearing simultaneously' (Lewis 2000). When we cannot make a choice between two or more contradictions because all contradictory perspectives are acceptable and present, the situation can easily become paradoxical. In such a situation, there is a lot of energy flowing between and around these mutually exclusive and opposite poles. In fact, both opposites are related to each other as a sort of interdependent whole.

Understanding and/or addressing paradoxicality in a situation does not solve problems per se, but it can create the potential for new possibilities. By staying within the duality and by immersing oneself in the opposing forces, it becomes possible to discover the link between them as well as the framework that gives meaning to apparent contradictions in the experience. The discovery of the link can provide the release of 'generative' energy essential for movement, action and organisational change (Ford and Backoff 1988) Moreover, to capitalise on paradox, some scholars suggest that organisations must use 'the inherent tensions to one's advantage rather than ignoring or resolving them' (Fiol 2002). Therefore, it can be argued that organisational success lies in sustaining the optimal edge between stability and instability (Stacey 1995). So, the point we are trying to make here is that organisational change does not originate in ignoring upcoming tensions or problem-solving, but in managing the coexistence of tensions between present polarities. Handling a paradoxical situation in this way entails:

1. Exploring synergistic possibilities for **coping** with enduring tensions.
2. Enabling participants to live and thrive with tensions.
3. Facilitating acceptance and active engagement (Lewis and Smith 2014).

Coping is proposed as being key to people maintaining well-being and satisfactory performance. In the changing workplace, employees are continually evaluating what is going on and what the significance is for them. They assess whether changes have any relevance for their well-being, and if so, in what ways. Such evaluations are of two kinds: a primary appraisal—What will I gain? What will I lose? What are the potential benefits or harm to me? Is what is happening irrelevant, can I ignore it?; and a secondary appraisal: What can I do to overcome or prevent the negative effects? What can I do to improve my prospects of benefiting from change? What coping options might be worth adopting? What are the likely consequences? Will I accomplish what I want to achieve? In addition, employees reappraise the outcomes that have been achieved as a result of their coping strategies within a changing environment, learn of the consequences and make further appraisals (Woodward and Hendry 2004). Coping is seen, therefore, as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus and Folkman 1984).

1.5.2 Introducing Complexity

The complexity of a context can vary, requiring interventionists to regularly check if all participants are still seeing their reality in a comparable and mutually comprehending way. In Fig. 1.1 we present Snowden and Boon's 'Cynefin model',[6] which helps people to identify how they perceive their context. The framework draws on research into systems theory, complexity theory and learning theories (Williams and Hummelbrunner 2010). As illustrated in Fig. 1.2, a simple context can be characterised by stability and clear cause-effect relationships that are easily discernible by everyone involved (Snowden and Boone 2007). A more complicated perspective implies that effective leaders are those who have the cognitive and behavioural capacity to recognise and react to paradox, contradiction and complexity in their environments. In general, complexity can be characterised as:

> [F]ull of interdependencies—hard to detect—and nonlinear responses. "Nonlinear" means that when you double the dose of, say a medication, or when you double the number of

[6]Cynefin, pronounced kunev-in, is a Welsh word that signifies the multiple factors in our environment and our experience that influence us in ways we can never understand (Snowden and Boone 2007).

	Context characteristics	Danger signals	Interventionists are dealing through
Simple	Clear cause-and-effect relationships evident to everyone. Right answers exist.	Entrained thinking. Overreliance on best practice.	• Sensing, *categorising* and responding. • Being delegative when possible. • Using best practices. Recognising both the value and the limitation of best practice.
Complicated	Cause-and-effect relationships are to be discovered. More than one right answer possible.	Overconfident experts excluding viewpoints of others.	• Sensing, *analysing* and responding. • Being clear in communication, and preferably face to face. • Listening to conflicting advice. • Encouraging people in dialogue to challenge expert opinions.
Complex	Many competing perspectives and ideas. Non-linear cause-effect relationships are only perceptible in retrospect.	Applying a command-and-control approach longer than needed.	• *Probing*, sensing and responding. • Being participative, involving others actively so new patterns can emerge. • Looking for automatic behavioural patterns (in response to the probing).

Fig. 1.1 An interventionists' guide to simple, complicated and complex contexts

From a reductionist, linear perspective	To a holistic, dynamic perspective
• Seeing individual parts	• Seeing interconnected parts and the whole
• Focus on objects and entities	• Focus on relationships and dynamics
	• Mapping patterns
• Measuring 'objective' results	
• Working with content	• Working with process and context
• Single issue within a single unit	• Multiple issues within and between multiple groups
• Designing blocks	• Organising principles
• Linear, cause and effect	• Non-linear, iterative and circular
• Uniformity	• Diversity
• Coordination via hierarchy	• Coordination via heterarchy in a learning infrastructure
• Limited connections by function, echelon or department	• Highly connected by network

Fig. 1.2 A shift in perspective, from change to changing

> employees in a factory, you don't get twice the initial effect, but rather a lot more or a lot less. [...] When the response is plotted on a graph, it does not show a straight line ("linear"), rather as a curve. In such environments, simple causal associations are misplaced; it is hard to see how things work by looking at single parts (Taleb 2012)

As argued by Snowden and Boone, in a simple context, the right answer is, for everyone involved, self-evident and undisputed. Often, in such simple contexts, decisions made by managers are unquestioned because all participants share an understanding. Simple contexts, properly assessed, require straightforward interventions and monitoring. This involves assessing the facts of the situation, categorising them and then basing the response on established practice. Exhaustive communication among managers and employees is not usually required because disagreement about what needs to be done is rare. It seems plausible that in a simple context, interventionists need to avoid micromanaging and stay connected to what is happening in order to spot a change in context (Snowden and Boone 2007).

Circumstances change, however, and as they become more complex, the simplifications can fail. In this regard, effective leadership, just as effective intervening, is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. The concept of complexity allows for the interventionist to be defined in a way that is compatible with the so-called law of **requisite variety**.

> The law of **requisite variety** says that in order to deal properly with the diversity of problems in a given context, an interventionist needs to have a repertoire of responses that is (at least) as nuanced as the problems they face (Ashby 1956).

Both complexity and requisite variety lead to a simple definition of effective intervening as the ability to perform the multiple roles and behaviours that circumscribe the requisite variety implied by the degree of complexity of a certain context. The shorthand version of this relationship is that only complexity can handle complexity (Ashby 1958). Complexity that goes unnoticed remains free to be expressed in unintended ways. For example, consider the rules for the flocking behaviour of birds: fly to the centre of the flock, match speed and avoid collision. This simple-rule theory was applied to industrial modelling and production early on, and it promised much, but it did not deliver in isolation. Human complex systems are very different from those in nature and cannot be modelled in the same ways because of human unpredictability and (self-referential) intellect. This is why simple contexts can easily become complicated when not regarded properly and can obviously become too complex to handle as we try to illustrate with the three business cases. This is most likely the case when interventionists, for example:

1. Incorrectly classify complex issues within a given context in a simple way because they oversimplify these issues.

2. Respond in a conditioned way, caused by entrained thinking, which usually occurs when they are blinded to new ways of thinking by holding on their own assumptions, they acquired earlier through past experience, training and success.
3. Become complacent, under the impression that things are going smoothly. If the context changes at that point, they are likely to miss what is actually happening (Snowden and Boone 2007, pp. 70–71).

To sum up in the words of Snowden and Boone, ‘those who try to impose order in a complex context will fail, but those who set the stage, step back a bit, allow patterns to emerge and determine which ones are desirable will succeed’ (Snowden and Boone 2007, p. 74). In other words, for change to be embraced, all participants’ best can be facilitated to become skilled in recognising and managing arising, contradictory tensions (Wolf 2015, p. 81). Under these circumstances, instead of going for the one ‘true’ or ‘right’ answer, an interventionist steps back a bit, probes and sees what is happening. For this to be effective, the context we are in has to be at least complicated, which means that there is more than one ‘right’ answer, resulting in contradictions and ambivalence.

1.5.3 Dealing with Paradox and Complexity: The Importance of Systems Thinking

Staying within a paradox by trying to manage the tensions between the opposite forces does not mean that we as interventionists are going to solve the paradoxical situation. As argued before, as interventionists, we need the energy that goes around and between the existing poles. Therefore, we need a more holistic and dynamic perspective: to see the whole picture while we also see what is going on between and within individual participants. This means that we look specifically at how outcomes are continuously fed back to the performing whole. Such a whole, whose essential properties arise from the relationships between its parts, is what is called a ‘whole social system’, and this way of looking and scoping whole social systems is called **systems thinking**.

Systems thinking lies in a shift of mind: ‘seeing interrelationships rather than linear cause-and-effect chains, and seeing processes of change rather than snapshots’. (Senge 1990) It is about the understanding of a phenomenon within the context of a larger whole (Capra 1996), which we can assess (or scope) by defining its boundaries.

Systems thinking is most often associated with the study of complexity, **feedback** and change (Flood 1999).

Feedback is a process in which the effect or output of an action is 'returned' (fed back) to modify the next action. Feedback is a two-way flow, inherent to all interactions, and is about the information sent back to a social whole or an interacting group of individuals about its prior behaviour so that the group as a social whole may adjust their current and future behaviour to achieve the desired result. In this regard, feedback is more than 'a report given back', but rather entails all news (conveyed as a 'difference') that made a subsequent 'difference' in a future conduct (Tompkins 1982).

To sum up, dealing with paradox and complexity means that we:

1. Keep an eye on the variety of relevant perspectives and the possibilities that they mutually connect.
2. Divert our focus from the content to the context: the social whole.
3. Start asking questions instead of giving answers.

1.6 Looking Further

1.6.1 Introducing 'Change' and 'Changing'

For didactic purposes, we consider a difference between change and changing. We reflect here upon them both in an opposing, slightly stereotypical way. For example, when an all-encompassing change programme is necessary in a medium-sized organisation, as was the case in our business examples in this chapter, it is plausible to assume that there is something seriously wrong with the way the organisation functions. For example, that the members of the organisation, including management, have not been aligned and/or not been affiliated enough with each other. Or that the organisation is lacking the **change capacity** to facilitate emerging developments and/or make sense of what is going on in and outside the organisation.

Organisational **change capacity** is the organisation's ability of analysing and realising change on a number of change dimensions: analysing change as *content* (what it is that changes), as *process* of interaction (how it changes in a series of interrelating elements of actions, reactions and interactions) and as *context* (why change is needed) (Soparnot 2011).

The simplest way to compensate for its own inertia and ignorance in the previous years is to catch up and force change with an intelligently engineered all-encompassing programme as we will introduce in Chap. 2. It is about going for the short-term effect, being efficient, planning interventions in the right sequence and management taking their responsibility. However, it is likely that this is too little

too late. Moreover, forcing change, top-down, cascading down the organisation in a linear way can be just a shot in the arm, overreaching its aim and without the necessary effect on the internal commitment of those for whom it was supposed to be in the first place: the employees. To be effective, ‘changing’ should be part of the daily workflow with people working together across the boundaries of their units and departments. Changing is about direct contact, direct feedback and working together in real time.

1.6.2 Introducing Co-Inquiry, Dialogue and LGIs

A collaborative process of co-inquiry has to be, by all accounts, interactive and multilateral—something we will relate to action research and appreciative inquiry in Chap. 3 – to dialogue in Chap. 4 and to large-group interventions (LGIs) in Chap. 5. As shown earlier in the business cases in this chapter, interactive collaborative sessions are not a panacea for all things that are going wrong when we introduce change in an organisation. In fact, for people to embrace change, we need more than just a ‘stand-alone’ collaborative dialogue session. As a way of intervening, co-inquiry is about encouraging people to espouse what they see as actually happening, and in dialogue comes to an adapted and more shared ‘sense making’ of the current reality. Organising an ongoing dialogue as a way of ‘changing’ is not a sinecure and requires as we introduce in Chap. 5 a developing learning infrastructure. We start by discussing the main principles of ‘co-inquiry’ in Chap. 3 by describing the bedrock that Kurt Lewin laid in the 1940s with his action research, force-field theory and theory of change. The field of ODC is built on this bedrock, and it is intriguing to see how Lewin’s work is still relevant for looking at, and intervening in, today’s business problems.

1.6.3 Introducing Intervening, Enabling and Learning

Any organisational change that requires a change in ingrained behaviour patterns requires direct involvement on the part of those whose behaviour it concerns; it requires a certain level of quality in exchanging perspectives and perhaps also a social movement at some level. To enable others and to support them in emerging processes, an interventionist is supposed to strive for inclusion, openness and reciprocity minimising the need for hierarchy (Quinn et al. 2000). Enabling others to cope with the ongoing change requires also a certain level of personal discipline from the interventionist to cope with paradoxical situations and maintain integrity. In fact, it requires of all involved – participants as well as interventionists—that they critical examine the potential for self-hypocrisy and or for patterns of self-deception. Turning inwards, working from the inside out, clears our minds of the clutter and obstruction that so often we try to pass off as wisdom of experience (Revans 1966). Dissolving the boundaries between seer and seen helps. As we continue to argue in the Chaps. 6 and 7, this will lead not only to a deep sense of connection but also to a

heightened sense of possibilities for change. What first appeared as fixed or even rigid begins to appear in our interactions with the other participants as fluid and dynamic because we are sensing the reality as it is being created (as we speak), and as we become to see our part in creating it. This, of course, applies to knowledge and understanding of ourselves, and in that sense, the understanding of the microprocesses in ourselves and between us and other people. In Chap. 8, we present a narrative in which the interventionist in hindsight engages in autoethnography to recognise, evaluate and test his leading assumptions with which he construes and chooses to intervene in the business case of the healthcare organisation.

1.7 Introducing Perspective and Perceiving

As we will develop further in Chap. 2, there are a lot of assumptions on 'change' and 'change management' that are handled as 'accepted truths' and that hinder not only the process of changing itself, but also the further development of the field of ODC. As we experienced it ourselves, it is a challenge to stay away from a reductionist, linear world view and try to keep seeing things from a more holistic and dynamic perspective. This assumes that we are in need of a shift in our perspective on change and change management as illustrated schematically in Fig. 1.2.

As schematically displayed in the next Fig. 1.3, using insights from theories like social constructionism, systems thinking and complexity theory helps us to perceive circularity in how people interact and create complex situations. These perspectives also give a certain way of looking at the two main change approaches in this book, namely, organisation development and change management, as we use both for developing concepts that can be used as intervention methods.

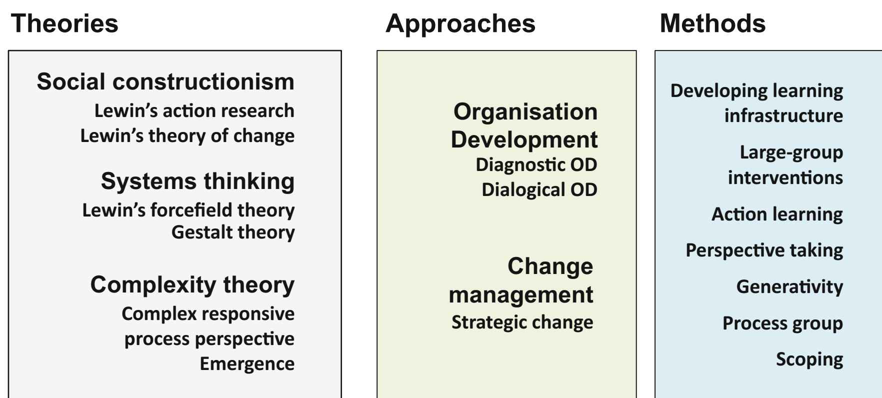


Fig. 1.3 Overview of main theories, approaches and methods

Recap

- From a social constructionist perspective, ‘reality’ is something that can differ according to the individual and the group to which the individual belongs and, therefore, is not an absolute. When we intervene from a social constructionist perspective, we relate ourselves directly to ‘what is going on’ in the way people perceive this themselves.
- Basically, an intervention is about relationships and interaction and can be seen as an act of inserting one thing between others. Ultimately, as shown with Barnard’s ‘appellate cases’, sense giving is concerned with inserting a new meaning to a given situation, and by definition, an intervention towards a reframing of the current ‘reality’.
- The process of managing implies being consistent and efficient and focusing on what is known. On the other hand, the process of changing implies introducing disturbance, experimenting and moving into the unknown. Together they make ‘change management’ an oxymoron, a phrase or statement that seems to say two opposite things.
- Organisational change begins with a status quo being disturbed, resulting in emerging differences, disruptions, disturbances and dissonance being perceived but not necessarily conceived. As a process, (organisational) change fundamentally (1) has something to do with time, energy, the same entity, perception and exchanging and (2) takes place on two interrelated levels: at a micro level as an individual process of learning to cope and at a meso or macro level as a process of exchanging the ‘learnings’.
- With different interpretations of what is going on and what to do about it, we can easily find ourselves stuck in an undesirable, paradoxical situation, that is, in a situation among colleagues who apparently do not agree with our vision and do not support our efforts to make the requisite change. In this way, changing circumstances form a breeding ground for dualism and/or polarisation in terms of distrust and opposition.
- In a paradoxical situation, it is hard to see how things work by looking at single (individual) acts. That is why it is important that an interventionist tries to keep an eye on the whole of human dynamics within a certain context. Only then is an interventionist able to see the circular nature of a paradoxical situation.
- A complex context can be characterised by interdependencies and non-linear responses. As Snowden and Boon’s ‘Cynefin model’ suggests, those who try to impose order in a complex context will fail, but those who set the stage, step back a bit, allow patterns to emerge and determine which ones are desirable will succeed. This statement echoes Ashby’s law of ‘requisite variety’, leading to a definition of effective leadership as ‘the ability to perform the multiple roles and behaviours that circumscribe the requisite variety implied by the degree of complexity of a certain context’.
- This brings us to the conclusion that for organisational change to be embraced, people must be facilitated in recognising and dealing with arising contradictory human dynamics. However, with management less trying to manage

organisational change, there are probably less contradicting human dynamics to facilitate.

Key Discussion Points

1. Seeing change as a non-linear process.

Apparently, we need a non-linear way of looking at change—a way of looking that captures the kind of complexity, ambivalence and circular movements people engage in.

- Argue why this is important.
- Argue, in this regard, what the benefits and blind spots are in Fig. 1.2.
- Describe the main characteristics of linear and circular thinking.

2. Human prerequisites for perceiving change.

Perceiving and conceiving change apparently has something to do with some prerequisites.

- Describe the main differences between perceiving and conceiving.
- Discuss the main prerequisites of perceiving change. Are these sufficient to be able to see or experience change?

3. Planned change ‘versus’ emergent change.

In this chapter, management is regarded as the art of planning, organising, leading, controlling and forecasting. Consequently, change management implies consistency, efficiency and predictability, i.e. focusing on what is known. On the other hand, emergent change seems to suggest something new arising out of connections and contexts that were not perceived just moments before, which seems to imply that stepping back, letting it happen, and asking questions is the best course of action.

- Argue why change management is an oxymoron.
- Define change management in your own words based on the information in this chapter.
- Argue why you believe that change can/cannot be managed. If you have the conviction that change can be managed, what is it that you manage? If you don’t have this conviction, what do you have to do to realise organisational change?

4. All definitions of change are problematic.

Based on Fig. 1.3, it seems that ‘changing’ can be compared with ‘continuous change’. However, it seems that with an organisation continually changing we don’t need change management as we defined it in this chapter.

- Discuss the main viewpoint here, is it plausible? Why do you think it is? Or if you think it isn't, can you argue why it isn't? Make use of the information in this chapter in your arguments.
- Argue which viewpoint on change you prefer: the viewpoint of change or the viewpoint of changing? Be clear about your arguments.

5. Social constructionism—what's in a (theoretical) perspective?

Social constructionism is introduced in this chapter as a scientific paradigm with a unique set of premises, with which we can look at what is going on when people are acting and changing.

- Define what you regard as the unique characteristics of social constructionism as a perspective on organisational change. Base your descriptions on the information in this chapter and try to be as complete as possible.
- Define what it is that you see when you look at organisational change from a social constructionist perspective. Be as explicit as possible.

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