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# Preface

Most people who are interested in the field of organisation development and change (ODC) will have heard of Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), whose work focused on the use of human dynamics as a way of generating change. His research has influenced many practitioners interested in helping others to cope with change. Among these figures are well-known names in the ODC field such as Douglas McGregor, Chris Argyris, Edgar Schein, Robert Marshak and Gervase Bushe, to name but a few of those who have continued and developed Lewin’s work. Just like Lewin, they are not only practising scholars but also academic practitioners: their publications achieve a neat balance between theoretical insights and empirical findings. With this book, we build upon their publications, introducing theory with practical examples and offering case study-led insights with theoretical reflections.

As a scholar, lecturer and practitioner for more than 25 years in the field of ODC, it has always been my experience that managers and students benefit from active mutual reflection on the issues at hand. It does not matter whether they are managers following a Master of Business Administration (MBA) or students completing a Master of Science (MSc). Everyone benefits in their own way from the open exchange of ideas, regardless of whether the subject in question is theoretical or practical. In this regard, managers are sometimes a little reluctant to investigate the theoretical implications of their practical experience, while students often seem to be reluctant to accept different shades of grey in the practical implications of their theoretical knowledge. However, both benefit to the greatest extent if the applicable themes are reflected upon, both from a practical and a theoretical perspective. As it turned out, replicating this duality and maintaining the right balance between theory and practice proved to be one of the main challenges in writing this book.

The focus of this book is on the manager and the consultant who intervene in the matters of others with the purpose of changing their way of working in relation to their context. In today’s business world, such interventionists are presented with challenges like:

## **1. Prioritising and focusing in a continuously changing world**

Faced with complex, paradoxical situations, competing goals and changing obligations, interventionists are constantly weighing up the interests and stakes of all involved. Under these circumstances, one of the main contemporary

challenges is probably keeping one's eye on the ball and prioritising high-valued work in a dynamic field of opposing forces. This is why it is so important for interventionists to assist in figuring out what is needed, to support participants in targeted ways and to continue finding common ground.

## **2. Committing various stakeholders in sharing one change purpose**

Organisational change is not always successful and the high frequency of change initiatives in companies can stress out everybody involved. Therefore, one of the contemporary challenges for interventionists is to help all involved to commit anew to every new change initiative. This is why it is so important for interventionists to construct a change philosophy that enables people to cope and commit themselves to the change purpose.

## **3. Changing while keeping the whole aligned**

Companies are evolving with each passing day. As business evolves, people need to evolve as well. This leads to questions such as 'How can interventionists help people to keep up with the pace of change?' Thus, one of the contemporary challenges for interventionists is helping people to learn and to change while maintaining the integrity of the whole. This is why it is important for interventionists to help participants in respecting the existing diversity in perspectives and at the same time keep them aligned.

Beneath these challenges lies the assumption that people want to be helped with changes that are generally imposed upon them. Just like Marilyn Ferguson, an American feminist writer, has observed: 'No one can persuade another to change'. According to her conviction, each of us guards a gate of change that can only be opened from the inside. We cannot open the gate of another, either by argument or by emotional appeal. The point here is that, as management guru Stephen Covey argues, if we want to change others, we first have to change ourselves. To change ourselves effectively, we first need to take stock of our own way of looking at things. In fact, as Covey maintains, until we take how we see ourselves (and how we see others and our relations with them) into account, we will be unable to understand how others see their world. If our attempts to change others are unsuccessful, the cause we generally articulate is that others are resisting our good intentions to change them. However, what we like to underscore with this argument is that it is unlikely that we will be able to improve ourselves as interventionists simply by blaming others for failing to behave according to our intentions.

So, the primary challenge for contemporary interventionists is that when we accept that our own assumptions lie at the heart of our own professional development and of each change approach we construct, then we must consider different explanations for unsuccessful change initiatives.