

## Reflections 2: Change and Organisation Development (OD)



*In the dialogue, Plato said; 'Heraclitus, I believe, says that all things go and nothing stays, and comparing existents to the flow of a river, he says you could not step twice into the same river'*

*Plato Cratylus 402a = DK22A6*

The quote above, from a philosopher more than 2000 years ago, reminds us that change is not new and is ongoing. Admittedly, the various Industrial Revolutions (we are currently in the fourth) played a role in accelerating change.

At the most basic level, change means that something is different from the past. Not only urban dwellers have reasons to complain. Everyone, even the most isolated hermit, experiences some degree of change on a daily basis. Change applies equally when discussing the seasons, socks, traffic lights, extinction of dinosaurs, DNA, the weather, atoms or the universe!

It seems the meaning of the word 'change' has become massive and all encompassing. It seems to have even replaced terms such as different, improved, deteriorated or even new. It has even become a cliché to complain about the degree and pace of change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. A term often used to describe the current rates of change, and the effect this has on us, is the 'rat race'.

We experience many forms of change. We should however not only think about the amount of change, but should also consider the degree of change we experience.

We can think of examples where people lose everything they hold dear and have to start again. History includes incidents where people were conquered / kidnapped and in some cases taken into exile and slavery.

And then we can think about changing our toothbrush!

It might sound extreme to compare a new toothbrush and slavery. On an emotional or human level, this is of course absurd, but the point I want to make is that we are constantly subject to things changing.

For some people experiencing or observing a specific change, it might seem manageable, and for others inhibiting. The experience and impact of the change will be different for each person. People have differing levels of ability to adapt and some even seem to take significant change in their stride. This resilience to change is influenced by an individual's perception that they have some control over it, be it in life, business or family, and a personal understanding of the power an individual has over his or her future.

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is a husband and wife team that supports Individuals, organisations and communities in their development.

Jan and Lyn bring together more than 70 years of experience. They share a passion for helping people, teams and organisations optimise their potential.

Although they work together at times, they each have their own unique strengths and consult individually under their own names.

Lyn supports organisations and individuals to bring social wellbeing and change through advocacy, mentoring, training and communication, while Jan works primarily to enhance understanding and support improvement through development/training and systems thinking.

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## Change & OD:

In businesses, change has become one of those terms shrouded in contradictions – and often hated! When consultants talk about change management there seems to be an aura of mysticism symbolising anything from business salvation to retrenchment or even individual skills development. It might even create images of loss of control and entering an abyss of darkness!

Add to this “mysticism” a plethora of terms, models and conflicting opinions and it is understandable that people become confused or uncomfortable. To complicate matters even further, the number of abbreviations, techniques, terms and applications is expanding at a seemingly exponential rate. At times, the number of new terms and techniques even seems overwhelming to people working in the field.

The term change management has recently increasingly been used in disciplines such as project management and IT. Implementing a new software system assisting with organisation performance is now a change intervention. If we view change in this way, we need to understand that change done from different disciplines is done in terms of the theories within that discipline.

One discipline that has been managing change processes since the 1950's is Organisation Development (OD). Kurt Lewin (1898–1947) is generally seen as the father of OD. The subject however really only started developing in the 1950's. OD practitioners have been referring to their discipline as change management since the 1950's. Recently, we have seen a return to the term OD.

There are different perspectives on the characteristics of OD. One model (<http://bit.ly/2NBjs2S>) indicates seven characteristics.

- 1. Humanistic Values:** Positive beliefs about the potential of employees and the organisation that comprises groups of people.
- 2. Systems Orientation:** All parts of the organization must work together. (The whole is bigger than the sum of the parts)
- 3. Experiential Learning:** The learners' experiences in the training environment should be the kind of human problems they encounter at work.
- 4. Problem Solving:** Problems are identified, data is gathered, corrective action is taken, progress is assessed and adjustments are made as needed. This is referred to as Action Research.
- 5. Contingency Orientation:** Selected actions and processes must be adapted to fit both the need and reality faced.
- 6. Change Agent:** Change champions stimulate, facilitate and coordinate change.
- 7. Levels of Interventions:** Problems can occur at one or more level in the organization so the approaches must varied and appropriate.

Richard Beckhard is quoted as defining **Organisation Development (OD)** as: “an effort planned, organization-wide, and managed from the top, to increase organization effectiveness and health through planned interventions in the organizations "processes," using behavioral-science knowledge”.

<http://bit.ly/2PtQaF2>

**Organizational Behavior (OB)** is the study of human behavior in organizational settings, the interface between human behavior and the organization, and the organization itself

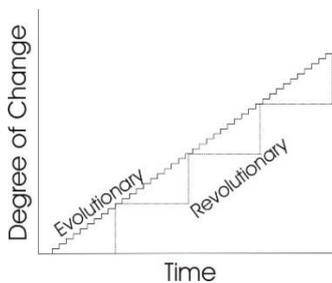
As a multidisciplinary field, organizational behavior has been influenced by developments in a number of allied disciplines including sociology, psychology, economics, and engineering as well as by the experience of practitioners.

<http://bit.ly/2EgMpJ>

When combining all the above with a project view, the OD practitioner often applies a concept called Process Consulting. Working with people makes it difficult, at times almost impossible, to predict all the reactions to the change. Ultimately, the process and interventions used must emerge as behavioural reactions emerge.

Ultimately, there are – in broad terms - three large approaches or macro models to strategic OD. The approaches link to the level of change implemented.

## Levels of Change



We said that one should consider both the extent and the degree (impact) of change. Throughout history, humanity experienced evolutionary - also called transactional - change and revolutionary - also called transformational - change.

Evolutionary or transactional change is a slow process with many small incremental improvements. Revolutionary or transformational change, on the other hand, has a large impact and is often highly disruptive. We can think of two different processes as example: people migrated across the earth over many (thousands of) years and for different reasons bring slow, evolutionary change, while the industrial revolution had a major revolutionary impact. Of course, the degree of change forms a continuum with revolutionary and evolutionary on the two extremes.

As can be expected, transformational change – for example a business takeover or extensive restructuring – can be highly disruptive, while transactional change could be as basic as redesigning a form or office layout. The diagram is a graphical representation of the two levels of change.

From a business perspective the two primary change models that relate to the above level of change are;

- Transactional / Evolutionary = Total Quality Management processes
- Transformational / Revolutionary = Business Process Re-engineering

## Trans-formational

**Business Process Re-engineering (BPR)** is a concept made “known” by the authors Hammer and Champy in their book with the same title.

In essence, the model requires exactly what the name suggests, that you ‘Re-engineer the process’. At its core, BPR means:

- Ignore – “forget” – **how** things have been done in the past.
- Use the **experience** and **knowledge** you obtained in the past as well as your understanding, and design the **ideal “new”** process from the ground up.
- Work from the perspective of: “knowing what I know today, if I was the first ever to do this, how would I do it?”

For optimal impact, BPR should be implemented system wide. Any BPR process will obviously have extensive impact and implementing radical change (BPR) in one part of a system will have effects – often unexpected - in another part of the system. BPR is therefore a high-risk, high-return strategy. It is however often implemented in a piecemeal approach and not as process-wide strategy.

## Trans- actional

**Total Quality Management (TQM)** is a process that has unfortunately gained an extremely bad name, through poor implementation by various consultants in the 1980's. Some consultants sold it as a fixed - one approach fits all – process and even as a recipe to follow for curing all competitive problems.

TQM is an integrative process developed in Japan for re-building their national manufacturing industry post WWII. It was more recently adapted to service industries.

Ultimately, TQM is built around three concepts;

- Empowering staff to identify and find solutions to problems they face in the workplace.
- Standardisation.
- Involving suppliers in strategic partnerships

These rest on the key principle of eliminating waste. It is important to note that the waste to be eliminated is all-inclusive and includes aspects such as material, time, space and even human potential.

## Integrative

The last change model we are discussing is not transformational or transactional, but can stand on its own or apply equally when implementing either transformational or transactional change.

Peter Senge and others made the concept of **Learning Organisations** popular. Learning Organisation as a process finds value in areas as diverse as recruitment, patents (Intellectual Property), Strategic management and even Artificial Intelligence (AI).

At its core, the concept of Learning Organisations requires answers to the following – and similar - questions;

- How do we build a central repository of intellectual property (Knowledge)
- How do we optimise individual learning throughout the total organisation
- How do we make sure we do not lose intellectual property through people applying expert power.
- How do we reduce re-inventing the wheel and making the same mistake again.
- How do we use what we have learnt as strategic resource.

As can be seen from the brief discussion of BPR and TQM, the more information we have and can share, the more we can improve organisational functioning.

The above approaches supply only a cursory glance at change and some philosophical processes underpinning OD.

Future factsheets will expand on these topics.

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