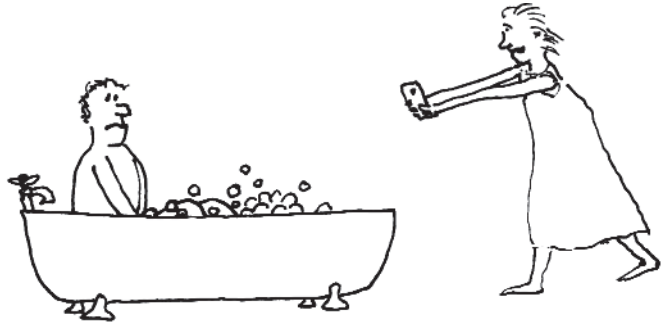
1

The Legacy of Twentieth-Century Ideas about Organizational Change

Picture the scene. I'm watching Boardwalk Empire *on DVD with someone who came of age well into the twenty-first century. We get to the scene where a young "gofer" is asked his name by another gofer. He replies, "Al, Al Capone." My young friend says, "Wasn't he a real person?" I don't answer immediately, pausing while I wait for a suitable gap in the dialogue. She answers her own question: "Yes he was." She reads a few sentences about Al Capone from her iPhone. She then asks, "Are any of the other characters real?" "I don't know," I say. A slight pause and then, "What's Nucky's proper name?" "Enoch." She looks up "Enoch Thompson" on the phone. "Oh yes, he's real too." Throughout our programme-watching her phone whistles at her intermittently, and each time she attends for maybe 30 seconds, smiling, pouting, texting.*

There is nothing new in this account, and everything. My dinosaur ways, such as watching a DVD rather than viewing content direct from the internet, my assumption that all relevant information is present in the vision and sound on the screen, my distance from my electronic "work" devices (it is the weekend, my mobile phone is in a bag somewhere, undoubtedly still on silent from the last meeting on Friday), all mark me out as essentially from the pre-digital age. My young friend engages with the world differently. Her phone lives in her hand. She is a cyber-person at one with the internet. It is always on and so is she. Any curiosity, mild or strong, can be instantly gratified. When she cooks a meal, before we are allowed to eat it a picture must be sent to friends. Arrangements with friends are so fluid as to be at times indiscernible to the naked eye as commitments. Fraught and loaded conversations with the boyfriend about "the state of the relationship" are conducted in 20-word text bites. She truly lives in a different world to me.

Positive Psychology and Change: How Leadership, Collaboration, and Appreciative Inquiry Create Transformational Results, First Edition. Sarah Lewis.



Introduction

My young friend and her colleagues are the inhabitants and creators of future, as yet unrealized, organizations. These organizations need to be fit for the changing world. At present we are in a state of transition from the solid certainties of the latter half of the twentieth century (the programme is shown once, at 9.00 p.m. on BBC1 – make it or miss it) to the increasing fluidity of the twenty-first century (watch it now, watch it later, on the TV, on a tablet, legally or illegally – whatever, whenever). This isn't only the case in the media world; it can be argued that the organizational development world is in a similar state of flux.

Many of the organizational development approaches and techniques that are in common use in organizations today were developed in the1940s and 1950s. Most of the theorists were male, European and living in America. Their ideas are located in a specific time and context. Their ideas and theories are not timeless truths about organizations and organizational life; rather they are a product of, and are suited to, their time and context. This chapter examines the key features of these organizational development models and their influence on current beliefs about how to produce organizational change. First though, a reminder of how much the world has changed since the 1940s.

A Changing World

The jury is still out on whether the recession of the last six years (as experienced by most of the Western world at least), is a temporary glitch in the upward path of increasing productivity and affluence, or the dawning of a new economic world order. What it has brought into sharp unavoidable focus is the interconnectedness of the world, and the complexity of that interconnectedness. Michael Lewis's books *The Big Short* (2010) and *Boomerang* (2011) spell out in words of few syllables how the US property and financial markets came crashing down, bursting property bubbles all over Western Europe, and bringing other markets down with them. One of the many insights to be drawn from this calamitous tale is that the level of complexity developed in the money market obscured the connective links between actions. One of the few who seemed to understand something of this before the event is Nassim Taleb, who, in his book *The Black Swan* (2008) (a somewhat more challenging read than Michael Lewis, and not for the faint hearted), essentially says that the real threat isn't what can be predicted, precisely because we can prepare for that; it is what can't be predicted. And his argument essentially is that the degree of fundamental unpredictability, for organizations, is growing partly because of the increasing level of complexity and interconnectivity of the world at large.

Unpredictability and complexity create challenges for change initiatives. When there is a high degree of unpredictability and complexity it becomes more obvious that not all the variables relevant to a situation can be known. Not all the likely consequences of actions can be predicted in their entirety, and the effects of our actions can't be bounded. Cheung-Judge and Holbeche note that "overall the challenges for leaders relate to dealing with the complexity, speed and low predictability of today's competitive landscape" (2011, p. 283). And yet we all, leaders and consultants, frequently act in the organizational change context as if we can control all the variables and predict all the consequences of our actions. A contributing factor to this misplaced sense of omniscience is that many of our change theories and models are predicated on the idea that organizational change *is* predictable and controllable. To understand this, we need to recognize that many of them are the direct descendants of ideas developed over 60 years ago, when the world was a very different place.

The Roots of Many Change Models

In the 1940s Europe was busy tearing itself apart in the second large-scale conflict of the century. It managed to drag in most of the rest of the world through alliance and empire as the war ranged over large parts of the globe. Every continent (barring the South Pole) and almost every country was involved. The German Nazi party gave itself the mission of purifying the German race by removing various Nazi-defined undesirable or foreign elements that lived among them. This desire to eradicate perceived threat was focused mainly on the large German and later Polish and other annexed countries' Jewish populations, but it was also aimed at homosexual men, Gypsies, and the mentally deficient. As the reality of the Nazi ambition became apparent, many under threat sought to leave Europe. America was a place of sanctuary before and during the war for those under threat of death, particularly the European Jewish population.

The genocidal intent of the Nazis and the industrialization of death through the extermination camps were a horrific and terrifying new reality in the world of human possibility. After the war the phrase "never again" encapsulated the ambition of many to understand and prevent such a tragedy from ever happening again. Many people devoted their remaining lives to trying to understand how it was possible for people to persuade themselves that such ambition and activity was not only acceptable but desirable and to be actively pursued. For some this expressed itself in an interest in understanding group dynamics. Organizations are a particular expression of social grouping. One German American Jewish refugee in particular wanted to understand how what had happened had happened, and more particularly, how to prevent it happening again.

Kurt Lewin was an immigrant German Jewish psychologist who found employment at Cornell University and then MIT. An applied researcher, he was interested in achieving social change and he developed the research methodology known as action research as a way of creating practical and applicable knowledge. As part of his work and research, Lewin developed models to understand and effect organizational change which still reverberate in organizational thinking. His three-step model of organizational change (1947), namely, unfreeze, change, freeze, is at the base of many more recent change models. This model understands organizations to exist in an essentially stable state, one that is periodically interrupted by short episodes of disruptive change. The use of the "frozen" image to describe the before and after state around the period of change suggests not so much stability as a deep stolidity, like a block of ice. This suggests that change is not something that might grow internally

from within the organization, but rather something external that needs to be applied to organizations to encourage change, to create the necessary unfreezing of the present state to allow change to happen. Lewin also described these external forces as a force field, and advocated force field analysis.

He suggested that at any point a stable organizational state is held in place by a force field of restraining and driving forces (1947). The field is revealed through the creation of a vector analysis diagram of any particular context, identifying the pertinent forces. The restraining forces, things such as organizational norms, structure, and so on, he argued, hold the situation in place. Driving forces, such as managerial desire or the consequences of not changing, are those that push in the direction of the desired change. While they are in balance the situation is in stasis. To achieve change, he argued, one needs either to reduce the restraining forces or to increase the driving forces. He argued that the restraining forces offer comfort to people, being familiar and habitual. He argued that a measure of discomfort needs to be introduced to get people to move towards a new situation. In this we can see the origin of the idea of the need in change to "get people out of their comfort zone." Similarly, when considering how to achieve change, the question frequently asked is, "So what are the driving forces for this change?" The force field model is one of analysis, suggesting that the total situation can be modelled and that all the forces for and against change can be identified. Integral to these ideas is the notion of resistance to change (1947, p. 13). As French and Bell explain it, "Identification and specification of the force field should be thorough and exhaustive so that a picture of why things are as they are becomes clear" (1999, p. 175). Some characteristics of old paradigm thinking are outlined in Box 1.1.

Box 1.1 Ten Indicators of Old Paradigm Thinking

1. How will we get buy-in?
2. How will we overcome resistance to change?
3. What are the driving forces for change?
4. We need to force people out of their comfort zone.
5. People don't like change.
6. Share information on a "need to know" basis.
7. Just tell them what to do.
8. I'm just a hired hand, they're head office.
9. I'm not paid to think.
10. Cascading communications.

Table 1.1 How the world has changed.

Twentieth century	Twenty-first century
National boundaries	Interconnected world
Jobs for life	Zero hours working
Data search	Data swamp
Fixed communication points	Portable communication points
Local competition	Global competition
Poorly permeable organizational boundaries	Highly permeable organizational boundaries
State-based world economy	Business-based world economy
Manageable rates of change	Unmanageable rates of change

Organizational development as an approach was built from these early foundations. Some of the early tools of organizational development, stemming directly from Lewin's early work, include T-groups, action research and participative management. These ideas can be seen in their present form in such common organizational development practices as team development, various forms of action research including Appreciative Inquiry, and employee involvement in decision-making. His research into human and group behaviour during change, and insights expounded about people and change, remain sound and indeed are fundamental to some of the ideas discussed in this book. Unfortunately, his engineering-based approach to understanding organizations has proved to be a stronger legacy when it comes to approaches to organizational change. While they may have proved illuminating in the world of the 1950s, the context within which human organizations exist and function has fundamentally changed (see Table 1.1). This means that some of the assumptions evident in various change models based on the application of his basic thinking are open to challenge. Specifically, we might now question the appropriateness of the idea of periods of stability between those of change; the idea that the whole situation is somehow "knowable"; and the idea of planned change as being sufficiently fast, adaptable, and flexible to achieve sustainable organizational change.

Legacy Thinking about Organizational Change

In line with these ways of thinking about how organizations develop, change in organizations is often characterized as hard, painful, and unwelcome; a process frequently feared and resisted both by those implementing

it and by those experiencing it. The most common explanation of the "emotional journey of change" is taken from a study of the bereavement patterns of those coming to terms with a loved one's dying and death (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Two of the most common topics for managers or leaders contemplating making organizational changes are "how to sell the change" and "how to overcome resistance." The need to identify and quickly manoeuvre out those who are deemed unable to "get on the bus" of change is a close third. This way of thinking encourages the belief that change is a huge drain on managerial energy as people are pushed through their resistance into new patterns of interacting and ways of working. Lewin's three-step model of change, now over 70 years old, is behind many of our current approaches to change.

For instance, it encourages the idea that it is possible to "finish" the job of change, that is, that it is possible to arrive at the most "perfect" organizational form that won't need any further attention. In this way, since hope springs eternal that this will be the last time this level of disruption will have to be experienced, change tends to arrive with a fanfare of announcements that it is "the answer." In addition to solving current issues, it will revolutionize the work, the company, and your life. All this reinforces the "this time we've cracked it" attitude to change as a one-off solution to the problem of organizational design. Lewin was not the only

one to apply an engineering eye to organizations, he was preceded by Taylor (1912). Between them they have created quite a legacy.

The Legacy Beliefs of Lewin and Taylor in Our Understanding of Organizational Change

1. Organizational life is essentially stable with necessary periodic episodes of disruptive change

This belief has particularly pernicious effects on how organizations approach change as it contains within it an understanding both that change is a discrete event and that it is an ongoing process. It is the former belief that encourages the idea that the many challenges of organizational design can be successfully resolved "once and for all," while the later reality means that in the longer term every change initiative is doomed to failure. Small wonder that this second implication gets overlooked in the enthusiasm for solving the issues right here, right now. This characterization of change as an occasional necessary disruptive event encourages three frequently observed beliefs among managers. First, they regard change as a discrete event that only needs to be attended to periodically (and the rest of the time can be ignored). Second, they regard change as an interruption to the normal running of things (that therefore isn't real work or their core work but rather a resented addition or distraction). Third, and this tends to be a more subtle, less overtly obvious belief, they frequently believe that the current necessity for disruptive change is an indication of some past failure to "get it right," the blame frequently being laid at the door of the last big change effort.

In addition, this belief discourages innovation or adaptation. Once the dust has settled from the most recent "change" there is a tacit understanding that "that's it" – problem solved. So what need for constant innovation? This is the best way; we can all breathe out and get back to work. However, over time the downsides of whatever the last solution was become apparent. As Senge said some time ago, "Today's problems come from yesterday's 'solutions'" (1990, p. 57). Over time, the benefits of the current organizational form become less and less obvious, and the downsides more so, until at last there is a huge effort made to swing the pendulum to the other extreme, solving the current downsides, and yet also sowing the seeds for the next "readjustment" in a few years' time.

2. There is a "right" answer to the challenge of organizational design

In essence there is no definitively correct answer to the challenge of organizational form and so all attempts predicated on the supposition of a right answer are doomed to fail. Indeed, in contrast, constant adaptation within an organization is healthy, as is a certain "untidiness." For example, exceptions to the generally accepted or standard ways of working may add value for a time, while a complexity of organizational forms under one roof may aid local performance and create flexibility. These are valuable organizational assets that can be destroyed during "big bang" change when the focus on consistency and a drive for efficiency frequently militate against flexibility and adaptiveness.

3. Logic is the route to achieving change

Leaders and managers frequently hold an unarticulated image of the organization as a machine (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2007; Morgan, 1997), subject to the rules of logic. This leads them to believe that the way to solve

organizational problems is to apply their powers of rational and logical thinking. Logic is a philosophical or mathematical discipline. However, few of us are trained philosophers or skilled mathematicians, and consequently, as many authors have shown (Kahneman, 2011), our "logic" is full of time- and energy-saving heuristics (that is, assumptions and shortcuts) and fallacies. In practical terms, this means that an appeal to "logic" to indicate the best solution to a challenge doesn't necessarily act to unite all in agreement. Apart from the general human difficulty in actually being logical in the strict sense of the discipline, there is also the challenge that each person's substitute, their idea of what "makes sense" or "seems logical," is based on their personal understanding of the world. In general terms, we make sense of things differently depending on our context, history, current drives, and so on, meaning that what seems an eminently sensible, indeed the only logical course of action to me may well, equally logically, seem like madness to you. In other words, our own particular beliefs are likely to seem perfectly "logical" to us.

While logical thought is defined as being free of emotional contamination, we humans are constantly assailed and affected by emotion, which affects our judgement. Even if something is accepted as logical, our feelings about a situation might affect our ability to act on that logic. To take an extreme example, starving people in desperate situations have been known to eat the flesh of their dead companions. Perfectly logical, assuming it is accepted that the main goal is the preservation of life.

I don't think you can argue the logic, but we are by no means all persuaded by it. Indeed, some in those desperate situations have refused to eat the flesh of their dead companions, so condemning themselves to death. And returning survivors rarely seem confident that all will understand and be persuaded by the logic of their decision. In an almost analogous organizational situation, an argument to cut cost by cutting back on staff may be perfectly logical, assuming the priority is to preserve the life of the organization, yet may still be anathema to some present, even though they can see the logic.

The point that is sometimes missed is that just because something is logically correct it doesn't mean it is morally right. Organizational decisions, involving people, cannot be separated from moral decisions. In social situations, decisions based on "logic" are, a priori, no more valid than those based on values or beliefs. However, in many organizations logic trumps almost every other argument, and moral argument in particular is not always even allowed a seat at the table. When doing what is logical goes

against our values, we can experience a sense of betrayal, of wrongness. Sometimes people find it hard to put their counter-argument to the "logic" into words, ending up with "I can't explain; it just feels all wrong." The experience of wrongness can be very visceral and embodied. Such feelings drive behaviour, frequently the behaviour that is labelled, harking back to Lewin, as "resistance" to change.

Psychological research in fact suggests that whatever we might declare to be the case, our choices in situations are rarely driven solely by logic; rather they are heavily influenced by emotion and values (Damasio, 2005). This suggests there isn't a neutral logical argument that will ensure that all see the light of the need for the change; rather there are more and less powerful voices in organizational systems, the "logic" of the more powerful tending to hold sway.

4. There is no need to take account of what has gone before

These change models are based on beliefs of the organization as a mechanical entity, and this sense of change as an engineering problem can be traced back to Taylor (1912) and is present in Lewin's work. For more on this see my earlier book (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2007). These models are frequently ahistorical and acontextual (Collins 1998). That is, they take little or no account of what has gone before, and they take no account of the "special circumstances" of the particular situation. Instead they are universal cures or panaceas. They can be applied anywhere, anytime, to any organization regardless of the particular organization's history or current state. This is essentially the big bang understanding of change: life starts anew at this point. This makes them particularly attractive to new brooms, of whom more later in Chapter 2.

5. People patterns can be engineered without psychological or social impact

If people are considered part of the change at all, they are considered as parts of the machine that can be moved about to predictable effect. Productivity is not supposed to be affected. There is little or no understanding of the cognitive and social energy that goes into reconfiguring mental models to accommodate or adapt to the changes. There is little to no understanding of the energy needed to learn new behaviours, and to suppress or override old patterns and habits. As a general rule, there is very little awareness of the

many and varied emotional impacts of change, including glee, envy, excitement, frustration, or relief, as well as despair or uncertainty.

Yet, paradoxically, at some level it is understood that people may be affected by change, although the conversation about this is shaped by the idea of resistance to change. Those trying to implement change can, unconsciously, conceptualize resistance as a conscious choice that some people make in order to be difficult and obstructive. The reactions of the "resisters" are usually viewed through the prism of their perceived self-interest, allowing their objections to be dismissed by the change implementers as "they would say that, wouldn't they." In this way those resisting can be held responsible for their reactions and the demand is often made that they "shape up or ship out." Rarely are "resister" reactions to change recognized as psychological processes not always under conscious control, as fundamental adjustments of identity and purpose that take time and mental energy to assimilate. Neither are they often recognized as a spirited defence of valuable and vulnerable aspects of organizational life and culture. Even more rarely is an accommodation made allowing that performance may suffer as organizational energy is diverted to adjusting and reconfiguring.

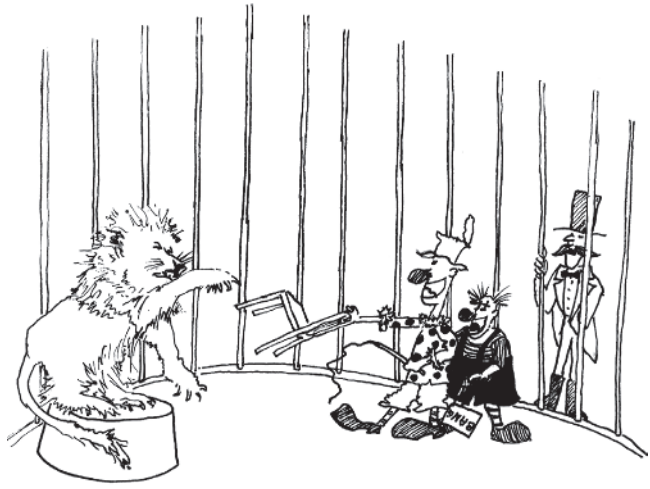
6. The whole situation can be modelled

There is often a belief that the organization in its current state can be "mapped." The changes can then be imposed on the map. However, the map is not the territory. Any map of an organization is going to contain inaccuracies. Therefore, any plan based on that imperfect map is going to be subject to corrective feedback where the assumptions of the map proved faulty. Unexpected reactions or effects of implementing the plan therefore should be embraced as giving useful information about how things are, rather than interpreted as a mistake in the planning. More usually though, they are regarded as mistakes or errors leading the organization to divert energy into "clampdowns" to reduce "deviations" from the plan, or into playing "the blame game," where they decide who to blame for a lack of omniscience.

7. People dislike change and have to be sold it

It is true that, on the whole, people aren't widely enthusiastic about change that is forced upon them without consultation, especially if it also appears to make their life or working conditions worse. It is also true that people

will often quickly become aware that if they point out the problems that the proposed change will cause, they will be labelled as a troublemaker or worse. Given this, they may passively comply rather than actively resist. This compliance is often confused with "buy-in."



The much repeated and highly prevalent belief that people are resistant to change often leads to a defensive and fearful approach to organizational change, inducing much girding of loins by managers before they go out to face the anticipated wrath of those affected by the change. However, if this were true, none of us would emerge from babyhood. We spend our whole lives in a state of change: allow me to welcome on to the stage at this point the process of aging. We often change our family set-ups (marry, leave home, have children), redecorate our homes, plan to be elsewhere (holidays, etc.), or embark on voluntary activities; or decide to write books. We are creatures of change and growth as well as creatures of habit. We are the most adaptable species the planet has yet produced. What is true is that change takes energy, and people don't necessarily always have the energy or inclination to engage with change. Frequently it is not change itself that is the issue but the effect imposed change can have on things that are important to us: autonomy, choice, power, desire, satisfaction, self-management, sense of competency, group status, sense of identity, and so on.

8. It is necessary to build burning platforms to achieve change

This belief is a natural successor to the one above. Since people don't like change, they have to be motivated into it through fear. Hence the often expressed need to "build a burning platform" to energize people towards the change. However, we might note that a natural response to a burning platform is blind panic or paralysing fear. People do not make great team decisions when they are panicking. They don't even make good personal decisions. Creating fear and anxiety as drivers for change can have unhelpful consequences in producing self-orientated, unthinking survival behaviour.

9. Resistance to change is a problem

Resistance to change is often labelled as problematic. Instead it should be viewed as a sign of engagement, of commitment. There are many truths in organizational life and they don't always align well. Some people may hold a different view about what is best for the organization. If they are prepared to risk conflict then they care enough to let you know.

10. Change cannot be implemented until you have thought through every step and have every possible question answered

This belief more than any other causes organizations endless problems as the expressed goal of perfect planning is unachievable yet the change process can't "begin" until it is achieved. This familiar "omniscience of the leader" (or leadership group) belief leads to exhaustive energy going into detailed forecasting and analysis of every possible impact and consequence: in the worse cases leading to paralysis by analysis. It slows things down, allows rumours to fill the information vacuum, and feeds feelings of disempowerment. Walking into an organization where there is huge awareness of "the need for change" and much talk about the change, yet where there is at the same time a sense that nothing can be done until "the plan is finally released" and where the release date of the plan has been delayed once or more already, is to encounter a readily recognizable state of "engines revving and no movement," or "wheels spinning and no traction." It is, in my experience, an undesirable state of anxiety, disempowerment, disengagement, and falling morale and productivity.

11. The path to the future is just waiting to be uncovered

Sometimes in change, leaders and planners act as if the future lies there waiting for us; that we have only to uncover the path and follow it. To believe this is to misunderstand the nature of time, and to confuse uncovering with creating. The future is in a constant state of creation, it doesn't exist until it is now. Our actions today affect or create tomorrow. How we understand the past affects how we conceive possibilities in the future. In this way we begin to see the creation of the future as an activity that takes place in a constant present. Creating the future starts with what we are doing today.

12. You can control the communication about change within the organization

This prevalent and mistaken "control" belief leads to embargoes on information sharing, "until we have decided everything" (see belief 10), and much investment in finding "the right words" to convey the story of the change. Meanwhile, people are free to make their own sense of what is happening, uninhibited by any corrective input from management.

Adherence to this belief can cause considerable difficulties for organizations, and particularly for leaders. For example, recently I was with the Group IT board of an international organization. Recent activity would make it clear to any observant member of this division that changes are afoot. For a start one of the big four consultancies is visibly around and involved in a large, future-oriented project. Sub-projects have been set up to examine alternative possible futures. Visits have been made to India, renowned for cheap and skilled IT labour. The team leaders present know their people are already putting two and two together and coming up with future scenarios that involve outsourcing and redundancies. They may well soon start asking difficult questions. What are the team leaders to say? This question, articulated at a team day, led to an interesting discussion illuminating how people navigate the boundaries between the story told and the story lived: trying to comply with the secrecy requirements while also accommodating the emerging group need for information.

In this situation, as is frequently the case, the official management line is that nothing has been decided, therefore there is no point in worrying about anything, and no need for a discussion as there is nothing to discuss. We can label this the *story told*. All well and good, except that people are active sense-makers who will come to their own judgement about whether the signs add up to anything significant. We can call this experience the *story lived*. By denying the necessity for a conversation about the difference between these two experiences, the organization also denies itself the chance to actively influence the sense being made of the things being observed. Without conversation it becomes impossible to reconcile the story lived and the story told since there is no acceptable meeting point. Prohibition of discussion is rarely an effective response to anxiety, working only to push things out of sight and out of reach of the leader's influence.

This group leader knows this and chooses to break organizational protocol by coming clean with her team, giving a full, nuanced, and contextual account of activity, current thinking, and plans as she understands them to be at present. It is a complex picture, full of potential, hope, possibility, political sensitivities and uncertain outcomes. While trusting them with this confidential information she also articulates her sense of vulnerability at doing this, since by doing so she is privileging their need to know over confidentiality obligations to other colleagues. They, in turn, make it clear that they have found this sharing of what is presently known (and what isn't)

immensely reassuring even in its uncertainty. In general, knowing is better than not knowing, as a lack of definite knowledge does not prevent the imagination from running riot. It is clear that this has been a very helpful conversation for everyone present.

Each team member is in turn leader of another team of people, the people most likely to be affected by future changes and whose anticipated questions partly stimulated the debate in the first place. Yet the guidance she gives in response to their concern about how they answer direct questions such as "Are we going to be made redundant?" is not to do as she has done, that is, to address that fear as a legitimate point of discussion, but rather to repeat the official line that "nothing has been decided yet." She expresses her hope that maintaining this line will "not set hares running about redundancies" that may or may not come to pass in the future. So the people she knows intimately, her team members, are treated as responsible adults who can manage ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity. The others, less "real" maybe to her as individuals, are to be treated as those that can't be trusted in this way. This, of course, is not entirely her decision. It is more that her sense of obligation to her senior colleagues is greater than her sense of obligation to these "others" and so overrides it.

However, this attempt to keep specific information "out" of the system puts those now in possession of that specific information in an invidious position – something the people in this particular meeting were well aware of. The talk extends into an ethical space. How can I feel I am behaving ethically when I am withholding information? At what point does just following the corporate line slip into actively misleading people? What will this do to my relationship with people I know and like and who I believe trust me? Then, as the practicalities of different scenarios emerge, so does another question: "Is it right to earmark some people as 'the talent' who must be retained during this uncertainty (and so implicitly label others as 'not the talent')?"

Once people know, there is no unknowing. Unintentionally, the group leader has passed the burden of managing this balancing act of being party to privileged information from herself to them. And in these situations the danger of informal leakage is very high. The group leader herself knows this. As she said in a reflective conversation after the event, "my fear is that even if they say the right things they'll give things away." And she is right. The momentary hesitation in answering the straight questions "Are they considering outsourcing?" and "Will there be redundancies?" is all people need to have their question answered, whatever words may follow.

The intention behind the desire to stick to the party line is honourable. The group leader wants to honour her commitment to her senior colleagues; she also wants to spare people the pain of worry and uncertainty. She wants to protect the organization from the disruption of distracted people worrying about a future that may not happen. The trouble is people may well be doing this anyway, but underground.

In many ways, it is easier to work with uncertainty when it is named and in the public space. We can't legislate for the sense people will make in situations, we can only hope to influence that sense-making. And we can only do that if we and they are part of the conversation. The danger in the very typical scenario outlined above is that the conversation goes on within the divisional membership and the leadership team are excluded from it. Two disconnected conversations emerge: the official leadership conversation and the hidden organizational one. When these become too disconnected it creates organizational problems.

13. You can control meaning created

Meaning is created, not dictated. I can *not* dictate to you how you are to understand things; I can only suggest. If I am unable to create a shared meaning with you then we are not aligned. All too often organizations try to dictate how their actions are to be interpreted by all.

14. To communicate about change is to engage people with the change

This belief leads to an over-emphasis on communicating about "the change." Staff hear managers talking endlessly about how important this change is, how big it is, how transformational it will be, yet no one

seems to know what the change actually means for people. To be part of this scenario is to suffer a confused sense of "but what are we talking about?" This in itself is usually symptomatic of the fact that at this point there is only a fuzzy picture of what this much-heralded change will mean for people.

15. Planning makes things happen

This belief in "plan as action" fuels a plethora of projects and roadmaps and spreadsheets of interconnection, key milestones, tasks, measures, and so on. People can invest time and energy in these plans and activities fondly believing that they are "doing change." The plan is not the change. It is, at best, a connecting link between a dream of the future and present day action. All too often those involved in creating the plan for change believe this to be the most essential part of the process, worthy of extended time and effort, while implementation is seen as "just" a matter of communicating and rolling out the plan.

Plans are predicated on stories of hope and dreams of the future. Plans are lifeless without the charge of hope and dreams. Their production is indeed a change in the world and the experience of planning can be very changeful for those involved. However, when organizations talk about change they mostly mean the visible effect of people doing their work differently. In this sense, for organizations, change happens when people change their habitual patterns of communication and interaction in a meaningful and sustainable way.

16. Project management is the way to achieve change

Charles Smith (2007), an experienced project manager turned organizational psychologist, has performed a fantastic analysis of how successful project managers actually do project management compared to how they tell us they do it. In the process he has discovered some very useful ways of thinking about projects and the role they perform in organizational life. In particular he notes that successful project managers have an unrecognized project-craft that they call on to aid the delivery of the "formal plan." I highly recommend this very readable book and meanwhile have picked out 10 juicy gems of insight and wisdom that resonated with my experience (see Box 1.2).

Box 1.2 Project Management Insights

Effective project managers:

1. Help the organization develop a local language for talking about change, above and beyond PRINCE2 language: talk of swimlanes and stop/go gates doesn't cut it.
2. Recognize that projects are about managing uncertainty and complexity; they create stories of order to help keep chaos at bay.
3. Understand that the project is not real; it is a social construction.
4. Think in terms of negotiating among tribal loyalties rather than the blander "stakeholder management."
5. Know that tribal identities are strong and permanent; project identities are weak and temporary: projects are political alliances.
6. Understand that project action and talk is all about sense-making.
7. Appreciate that project artefacts – diagrams, maps, risk registers – are physical enactments of sense-making and are important for this purpose.
8. Know the people affected by, or involved in, the project in a meaningful way to be able to influence or negotiate with them, acting to enhance their sense of identity.
9. Are aware that the risk register is a political document reflecting power and choice, not a neutral record of fact.
10. Understand that a project is a social process.

Adapted from Smith (2007)

Conclusion

Change conceived in, and implemented from, this perspective runs a high risk of creating what Cheung-Judge and Holbeche refer to as "scar tissue" (2011, p. 200). This scar tissue being "resentful, cynical and disengaged 'survivor' employees who no longer trust the organization or its leaders and are unlikely to give of their best to the organization in the future" (2011, p. 200). This approach to change, predicated on mechanistic metaphors and a mid-twentieth-century appreciation of work, organization and the interconnectedness or otherwise of the world, is out of date, ineffectual and at worst positively harmful to organizations and all who sail in them.