

changingorganisations: The Newsletter (No 5: June 2009)

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Hi there

This is June 2009's newsletter, [changingorganisations](#), for my clients and other professionals interested in organisational change. If June is the end of your financial year I wish you "Happy Year Ending." I am helping some clients tidy up some training strategy prior to the end of the year.

This month's [changingorganisations](#) is in four parts:

- Benefiting from Diversity
- Hot off the [changingorganisations](#) Blog – The Dangers of Shared Values
- Work In Progress
- Politically Incorrect Corner

## Benefiting from Diversity

For quick and inexpensive ideas for innovation, do your normal work but find ways to increase the amount of interaction amongst diverse people while that work is being carried out.

Complexity science shows that novel, innovative solutions arise from the interaction of diverse agents. For your team or organization, this means that you must foster interaction and communication between people who are different. Diverse agents doesn't necessarily mean people of different races or genders, although that diversity certainly can play a part. Rather, people of different professional backgrounds, life experience and work outlooks are valuable in this context.

An interview published in the NZ Listener of 23 May 2009 with economist [Philippe Legrain](#) entitled "[Variety is the Key](#)," says that "innovation comes from people with different ideas, different experiences and different perspectives sparking off each other." The interplay of different viewpoints, ideas and backgrounds is what will lead to the kind of creative and novel ideas your group needs to be able to figure out how to do more with less, or come up with a creative solution to a problem.

Legrain says that if there are 10 people in a room who all think alike trying to come up with a solution to a problem, then 10 heads are no better than one. But if they all think differently and are sparking off each other then solutions come faster and better.

This goes way beyond platitudes about valuing difference. The reality that is mostly ignored though, is that with diversity comes conflict and that is where the leader's role becomes important. The conflict can create so much anxiety that people cannot cope, then the group implodes and attempts to work together totally stop. No doubt you have seen it happen. This is why it is not easy to gain the undoubted benefits of the interaction of diverse people.

Enter your role as leader – someone who sees the value of team members continuing to communicate for the benefit of the team's creative results. This is not because of some politically correct exhortation to value difference, but because of your business imperatives to find new ways to deal with the challenges facing you.

As the leader of a team of diverse people who are interacting with each other, you will notice a rise in conflict and the anxiety levels of your people. According to Ralph Stacey in [Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics](#), to get through this anxiety and get to the point where the gold nuggets emerge you must be able to pay attention to this anxiety, not ignore it. Help your people to experience this anxiety as excitement that enables people to continue with the search for new meaning amongst the variety of opinions being expressed.

If your group is not experiencing high levels of interaction of diverse people, then either you do not have high levels of interaction or your group is not diverse. Here are three tips for each situation.

If your group is not interacting with each other, create forums for doing the work that require more interaction:

- Involve your people more than normal in a particular business decision you are making.
- Convene a discussion about a business issue you are facing.
- Have your managers ask their teams for input on a decision and get them to summarise the results at your next team meeting.

If your group is not diverse, introduce some diversity from outside:

- Engage with people from other areas of your organization about a business issue.
- Take your team to visit your equivalent team in another organization in a non-competing industry.
- Engage someone from the outside to provide a different perspective for your group.

By the way, don't create some special talk fest for this, it will just fizzle out and frustrate everybody. Instead, find ways of doing your normal daily work that increase the amount of interaction amongst diverse people. Think of people that wouldn't normally be involved in a particular issue and invite them along to broaden the range of input into the outcome. You can still keep responsibility for making the final decision. You have nothing to lose (unless your ego is in the way). And there is the potential for you to be pleasantly surprised by the result.

## Hot off the [changing organisations Blog](#) – The Dangers of Shared Values

The debate about shared values has been continuing on the blog with May being another record month for hits.

Values have an attractive, uplifting, unrestrictive sense of the ideal and are experienced as a kind of voluntary compulsion; we cannot help go along with them, and yet at the same time we are happy to do so. But the idea of an organization having shared values come with three dangers: the danger of [anthropomorphism](#), the danger of [cultism](#) and the danger inherent in the lack of recognition of the [conflict](#) that arises when values are applied.

To read the comments from others click [here](#) (set 1) or [here](#) (set 2) and to see all the postings on the topic of values click [here](#). There are 10 postings at the time of writing but there will be more by the time you read this.

## Work In Progress

Back in March I mentioned that I had finished the edits on my chapter in the upcoming volume of *Consultant-Client Collaboration: Coping with Complexity and Change*, edited by Anthony Buono and Flemming Poulfelt and published by Information Age Publishing. Well, there turns out to be another final step, editing the proofs. I've just done this and am told the book will be out by August for the next meeting of the Academy of Management.

My chapter in the book is entitled "Inside The Client-Consultant Relationship: Consulting as Complex Processes of Relating." The chapter is based on a paper I presented at the conference of the Academy of Management's Consulting Division in Copenhagen in mid-2007. It sure takes a long time to publish a book!

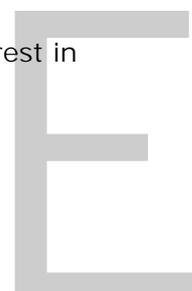
## Politically Incorrect Corner

In a workshop I facilitated recently there was a participant who had a guide dog, a beautiful friendly golden labrador. After I patted it rather vigorously it started to get a little overexcited so I had to tone it down. Then when I raised my right hand to write on the whiteboard I realised that my hands smelt of dog.

That evening I was telling a colleague about having a guide dog in my workshop and the first thing she said was "Did it expel wind?" Well, those are not the exact words she used, but you get the drift. The funny thing was that yes, at one stage in the workshop I did look around trying to see who the socially inept person was who had produced that smell because I knew in this case it wasn't me. I looked around accusingly, only to be met by the sweet and innocent eyes of the labrador. Hmmm.

It's mid-Winter here so I hope you're keeping warm. Thanks for your interest in our work.

Regards,



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"Stephen is really innovative and I consider him leading-edge around change and creative ways of working in the area of change. From my point of view, he has a great deal of knowledge and experience for people who need a change management expert."

Karen Eriksen  
Senior Project Manager  
Ministry of Justice

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