



This is August 2009's newsletter, Changing Organisations, for my clients and other professionals interested in organisational change.

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

- Cooking a Menu or Using What You Already Have Available?
- Hot off the [changingorganisations](#) Blog – Not on Board the Vision Bandwagon

## Cooking a Menu or Using What You Already Have Available?

I love cooking. It is an expression of what little creative power I possess. I have discovered (after reading an academic journal article!) that you can approach cooking a meal either as a chef preparing a menu that has been planned in advance, or as a home cook arriving home after work, looking in the fridge and in the cupboard and deciding what to make out of the already available ingredients.

Unfortunately in my cooking I seem to spend too much time trying to decide what to do with a wilting stick of celery, some dying radishes and half a mouldy cabbage, and none of the options ever seem appealing. Let's get takeaways instead!

The chef decides what meal to cook and then goes and finds the known ingredients which are required to cook the dish. The desired effect (i.e. the menu, the planned meal) is known in advance and then the ingredients or the means, are organised in such a way as to produce the desired meal.

By contrast, as the home cook I already have the means, i.e. the ingredients, and I have to choose the meal, the result (i.e. the effect) from a number of possible different ways of combining the available ingredients. For example, I could think of making celery soup or coleslaw if celery, radish and cabbage were what I had in the fridge.

So here we have two different approaches - one in which the outcome (menu) is given and the means are chosen in the best way to meet that outcome, and one in which the means (ingredients) are given and the outcome is then chosen from the available means.

These are two equally valid ways of preparing a meal.

Our ordinary lives are a lot like the home chef preparing a meal from the available ingredients. In other words, there is no crayfish in the fridge, so what will you do with the broccoli that you actually have? I could hardly believe it when we discovered a delicious "Pasta e Broccoli" recipe that is perfect for such situations. Email me if you would like the recipe.

Very often you are operating with known means (which may be limited), taking steps to work out what is the best way to proceed with the next step, with general goals in mind. In our case, for example, recently our old cat Biggles died (happily, with a mouse in her mouth!), now we are deciding what new cat or cats to get. The lawn mower has broken down, do we get a new one or repair the current one?

Compare this with our organisational lives. So often our time in organisations is spent like a chef preparing a set menu – planning and organising a series of dinner parties or set pieces to achieve a specific outcome. We spend so much of our time, energy, thought and preparation on meetings, plans and persuasive documents all designed to achieve certain predetermined outcomes, which is the equivalent of choreographing the cooking in order to achieve a chef's predetermined menu.

The thing is that when you are organising a dinner party with a set menu, you have to make sure you have the right ingredients to hand. So off you go to get those elusive special ingredients like lemongrass or perhaps icing sugar if you don't bake very often. While you are off making sure you have the ingredients you need for that special dinner, you are of course not using those ingredients that you already have in the fridge and in the cupboards, which do not fit into the meal you have planned. In the meantime they could go off and be unusable.

Our organisational lives consist of continuous projects, planning, team or project meetings, meetings with team members, and meetings with internal and external customers. All these meetings seem to have agendas; it's as if we think the only way to communicate with each other is to have a pre-planned agenda. Or, as if the only way to cook is to have a dinner party with a pre-planned menu.

Having a pre-planned menu leads you to concentrate on the ingredients required for the special dinner and so you tend to overlook the ingredients already in the fridge in favour of those that fit with your menu. In the same way, your focus on plans for the special initiatives you are currently working on means that you tend to overlook what is going on around you in the present, especially those things that don't seem to be contributing to your initiatives. You tend to overlook your own organisational "ingredients in the fridge" in favour of those that are in service of your plans for the future.

The focus on the future renders invisible what is actually going on around you at the moment. Consequently your emphasis goes onto what you should do for the future rather than what you should do to address the issues of the present.

Before I totally mangle the analogy of the cooking of the meal, think about the balance in your own working life between cooking a menu for a dinner party and cooking tonight's meal with what is in the fridge.

In your organisational life, are you currently focusing more on dinner parties or on making edible meals out of what's in the cupboard? Are you focusing more on your plans for the future at the expense of the potential value you already have right in front of you, right now, in the form of your current customers, your current staff, your existing resources? By the way, it is exhausting to be endlessly throwing dinner parties.

## Hot off the [changingorganisations](http://www.changingorganisations.com) Blog – [Not On Board the Vision Bandwagon](#)

CEO of Air New Zealand, Rob Fyfe, is not a fan of vision, mission and values. Welcome to the club! This brief article was published on the [blog](#) on 22 July.



I have been relatively vocal on the blog about my scepticism of the value of creating organisational vision, mission and values. Thanks to Vivie for pointing out an interview with Rob Fyfe, CEO of Air New Zealand published in the April edition of North and South magazine. Towards the end of the portrait of a man highly regarded by his peers

who certainly has an excellent track record to date, I was startled to read his statement of his stance on vision and values.

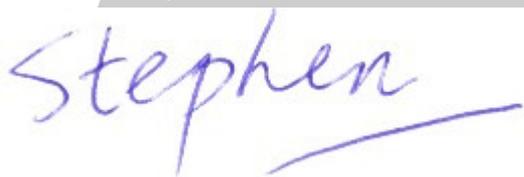
"One of the first things I did as CEO was outlaw things like 'mission' and 'vision' and 'values,' because I don't see those concepts as really connecting with people at the front line. A vision is a personal thing; you can't have it imposed on you, or articulated to you by someone else." Hear hear, I say.

The interview goes on to say that instead, Fyfe asked a single question: "Who are we?"

I'm loving this. Let's not get caught up in abstractions like vision and values and the associated semantics. Instead, let's notice and reflect on what's going on around us right now ("Who are we?").

As always, thanks for your interest in our work.

Regards,



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