

changingorganisations: The Newsletter (No 2: March 2009)

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Hi there,

This is March 2009's newsletter, [changingorganisations](#), for my clients and other professionals interested in organisational change.

This month's topics include:

- Six Myths About Organisational Change
- Hot off the Blog – Sender / Receiver Model of Communication
- Forthcoming Publications

Three Myths About Organisational Change

Three myths about organisational change arise from thinking about change that does not match up with the experience of actually working in organisations.

I think we have a problem with the way we think about change. The problem is that our managerialist thinking about organisations and how they change does not match up with our experience of actually working in organisations. Here are three of these managerialist myths along with their corresponding realities. There are three additional myths in the full article published on my website at <http://www.changingorganisations.com/2009/03/six-managerial-myths-about-organisational-change>.

Myth 1

In the world of managerialism, a scientific gap analysis will allow managers to create a vision detailing how the future will be for all the people in the organisation, measure the gap between that desired future and current reality, and plan how to close that gap.

Reality 1

In the real world the future unfolds as the interplay of the intentions of many people involved in the organisation. The gap analysis helps you to develop a plan. The plan represents the intentions of those involved in the project. Those intentions interweave with the intentions of others in the organisation.

It is useful to have a plan, but the plan will change a lot on the way. It does not map out exactly what will happen, and it does not take into account insights and further thinking that will occur in the future.

So you have to pay careful attention to the intentions of others and how the interweaving of these intentions is playing out, a reality that is ignored in the gap analysis approach. Too many managers concentrate on the plan at the expense of responding to what is going on NOW. In other words, they concentrate on what 'should' be happening, rather than what 'is' happening. This inhibits their ability to respond effectively to unexpected situations, partly because they are so focused on their plan that they do not notice at an early stage, the subtle shifts that result in these unexpected developments.

Myth 2

In the world of managerialism, change happens in stages planned as a project (e.g. see this [blog post](#)). Echoing this, it is also assumed that individuals will go through stages such as a grief cycle (e.g. SARAH – Shock, Anger, Resistance, Acceptance, Help) By implication, change happens when managers intend it to happen.

Reality 2

In the real world, change is taking place all the time, whether or not managers will it to. Change occurs in the conversations that take place in the lunch rooms, in the smoking areas, in the corridors and around the water cooler. It does not take place in stages, even if the project is planned that way. Most project plans ignore what is going on in the lunch rooms, in the smoking areas, in the corridors and around the water cooler.

Myth 3

In the world of managerialism, the present is a point between the past and the future on the timeline that tells us what stages and activities we should be up to now.

Reality 3

In the real world, people take action in the present based on their experience of the past and their expectations for the future. For example, people make decisions about their investments in the present, not knowing what is in the future, but having expectations, for example about what the real estate market or perhaps finance companies will do in the future. For example, we are currently seeing a move of contractors into permanent positions.

One job recently attracted 55 candidates – when it was advertised 18 months ago it attracted only two candidates. Contractors are making their decisions based on their expectations for the future – when these expectations for the future are different, for example if they are more optimistic about contracting, then they take different action, they make different decisions in the present.

Past experience is relevant too – most people working in organisations have by now experienced various change initiatives. I was approached by one employee in a client organisation recently who told me that his wife had a high powered job in HR in a big organisation. He had showed her the material we had put out - it was being compared with not only his previous experience but also that of his wife in other organisations.

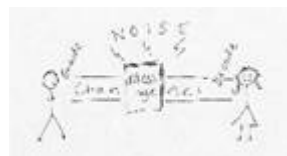
Conclusion

Most approaches to change do not match up with the lived experience of working in organisations. They commonly privilege formal channels of communication and do not pay enough attention to the 'shadows,' to the informal communication that takes place in organisations, which is where change initiatives are undermined. No wonder 75% of change initiatives are reputed to fail.

This article describes three myths. There are three additional myths in the full article at <http://www.changingorganisations.com/2009/03/six-managerial-myths-about-organisational-change>.

Hot Off the Blog - Sender / Receiver Model of Communication

February on the [changingorganisations](#) blog saw us achieve the significant milestone of passing 1000 hits in a month. Thanks to everyone who has been to have a look at the blog. Entering the zone of the thousands is giving me a warm feeling inside.



There has also been a flurry of interest in the blog's description of the sender / receiver model of communication. In particular Google tells me that lots of people have been looking at the [illustration](#). I have to confess I drew this myself using my elementary stick figure drawing skill so the interest in this picture was quite a surprise to me (no one's ever been interested in my drawing before!).

While sender / receiver is a very common way of viewing communication, it has a number of weaknesses which are explained and overcome by the alternative given in the blog's [subsequent post](#).



The subsequent post also has this illustration that I commissioned from professional illustrator [Martin Coates](#). Much better!

Forthcoming Publications

I have recently completed edits for my chapter in the upcoming volume of *Consultant-Client Collaboration: Coping with Complexity and Change*, edited by Anthony F. Buono and Flemming Poufelt and published by Information Age Publishing. My chapter 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. The editors picked a number of papers from the conference to publish in this volume so I am very excited about this, which is the second chapter I have had in print in an edited volume.

I am currently in the early stages of working on my own book on organisational change and will keep you posted on its progress. If you are interested in being a sounding board please send me an email and I'll send you sample chapters for feedback.

Thanks for your interest in our work.

Regards,



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Clients say...

"... We were able to keep the organisation running at the same time the change management process was underway, because of Stephen's ability to keep things highly flexible and his ability to stretch..."

Virginia MacEwan
Chief Executive
Wellink Trust

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