

## Effective (Organizational) Change: Art or Science?

This is an interesting and wide-ranging theme that can be approached from many perspectives. This is certainly the case if undertaken at a holistic level and from a social-constructivist paradigm, and when each individual perception is a claim to a unique 'truth'. It also applies in the case of effective, not to mention efficient, (organizational) change. Change is difficult for individuals and organizations due to many interconnected and interwoven psychological and social aspects and the specific economic and organizational context in which the proposed change should or should not take place. 'Should or should not' in the sense of the initiator(s) of the intended change and its (im)possibilities. For simplicity's sake, this article omits questions of whether individuals and organizations are, in fact, 'engineerable' and whether 'design or development' is or should be possible. Rather, it examines whether management tasks, once described by Machiavelli, are relevant and effective or whether the influence of the manager and/or leader is overrated. And it asks if the (change) direction of individuals and organizations is a result of an economic and social power game in the direct and indirect interactive environment? The vast majority of managers and leaders are convinced of their experience, expertise and skills; but they have little or no awareness about how much (perhaps irreparable) damage they wreak in daily practice and when supporting transition or transformation processes with a lack of vision, strategy and adequate social skills. A lack of oversight leads to a higher 'change threshold' and a decrease in the tempo of change. Not to mention their ability to judge their own contribution or role in this process and the ability to achieve (behavioral) change in themselves and/or others. Simply recognizing and identifying or understanding and fathoming symptoms is difficult due to a lack of well-founded knowledge and poorly developed communication and social skills. Insight into cultural differences, the effects of emotion and the lack of adequate empathy also play a role. Also missing is the ability to see things from multiple points of view and the necessary skills to draw on different identities in order to effectively meet the right need in a specific interactive case. That is to say: the more management and leadership identities I have access to, the more effective I can be.

What contribution can practice and theory make to investigating and/or improving this 'limited' functioning? Perhaps the greatest – albeit unintentional and unconscious – contribution provided by practice is far from optimal behavior and action. Despite the pretense of social equality in many organizations, social relations are never equal. This inequality is driven by unprofessional behavior. Power gained through having specific experience, expertise or resources, political intentions or frequent misappropriation of 'rights' through shareholdership, self-interest, emotion, nepotism, specific management position, supposed status and especially overestimation of own abilities is all too familiar. The manager investigates – insofar as the manager investigates at all – and analyzes from his or her own rich, but limited, working environment and specific culture and produces well-intentioned suggestions. Experience shows that, in reality, these suggestions frequently fail to support practice and therefore are not or are barely feasible and rarely produce

the desired result. It is often a question of a lack of substantive knowledge or underdeveloped social skills. Without a certain level of expertise – simply put, knowing what you are talking about – it is impossible to understand certain issues, let alone to act and respond appropriately. The self-convinced manager and/or leader comes across as having insufficient basic knowledge and lacking in social skills.

The perhaps unintended and unconscious contribution that science delivers is a relatively one-sided, fragmented and incoherent picture. Practice is examined from different levels of aggregation, paradigms and perspectives. Instead of complementing and enriching each other, there are persistent antagonisms, such as those between the methodologies of anthropology and psychology. Years have been spent building on existing methods, techniques and theories. They may look different, but they have been developed without creativity. This is in order to maintain the scientific institutional world; production without innovation, based on self-interest and status. Consequently, the level of expertise is deteriorating. The scientist researches and analyzes from his own rich, but also limited, research community. Experience shows that research provides a limited contribution, either because it is not understood by the average manager and/or leader or because it does not really relate to practice. The self-convinced academic shows little sign of really understanding and fathoming practice.

It is desirable for practice and theory to complement each other, so that there is greater understanding about what the manager, leader and/or scientist needs and can grasp. For example, by means of, among other things, action learning, intervention methods, reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action there are frantic attempts to develop individuals and organizations that should lead to observable (behavioral) change. Change is difficult as it often affects the identity of individuals and/or organizations. Ultimately, (individual) characteristics such as fear, arrogance, narrow-mindedness, motivation, ego, self-interest, self-will, status and certainty are determining and decisive factors. Devoid of the necessary self-knowledge, people tend to be 'too big for their boots' rather than being intrinsically motivated to develop different levels of learning: paradigm, perception, attitude, behavior, expertise and skills.

The average manager, leader and scientist simply lacks a complete and balanced set of standards and values and the interest and skills to learn these effectively. A sound moral education and completing a well-thought out and well-founded schooling are essential. Here, coaches, parents, the government and teachers fulfill a critical role with regard to the imparting and development of fundamental knowledge and the learning of moral and social skills. An inquisitive mind intrinsically motivated and based on service, empathy, group interest, integrity, loyalty, respect, open-mindedness and focused on the development of content and moral and social skills must be developed. More constructive criticism and holding each other responsible for 'dubious' behavior, (linguistic) incorrectness and the absence of knowledge and/or skills should be the basis for the capacity and willingness to learn from each other. Avoiding dialogue and discussion may appear to be the easiest way, but ultimately leads to the erosion of quality and

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results in a level of performance that is no longer competitive. Instead of strengthening each other, we are weakening each other and we are becoming competent in being incompetent.

Effective (organizational) change; is it an art or a science? The art for manager, leader and scientist is to critically evaluate and adjust his or her own ego, behavior and position by showing humility and being committed to working on understanding the scientific basis of practice and by respecting each other's view, standards and values. The aim is to stimulate and develop an inquisitive mind in oneself and others. The complexity of (organizational) change is not so much in the specific economic and organizational context, but rather in the capacity of individuals with respect to the ability and willingness to develop 'healthy' standards and values and the corresponding respectful behavior; effective (organizational) change as art and science in one.

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