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**article:**

*the zone of entanglement  
change, non-change and the new managerial ideology of ephemera*

the zone of  
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 new managerial ideology of ephemera  
 david rooney\*  
 and greg hearn

*We argue that change management has become ideological and that by selective use of complexity research has used the imperative for change to further political and economic agendas. We seek to redress this situation by developing a critical perspective on change and a new metaphor, the zone of entanglement, to assist critical analysis of change. Central to our argument is that a dynamic of change is non-change. In this vein, we show that there are deep, robust and persistent structures that dampen change and which, if recognized, may help in achieving organic change, resulting in positive social transformations.*

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Much has been made in recent years of the need for flexibility; for self-reliant individuals; for the ability and desire to quickly respond to change; and for the need to do away with artificial protection from exposure to the vagaries of the global market place. In this worldview, radical 'restructuring' and accelerated change are needed for a prosperous future. Represented here is the dominant mode of economic analysis in the English speaking world. But, is this a rational view of reality? We argue that it is a mistake to focus as narrowly as current thinking dictates on these kinds of issues, which upon deeper analysis appear to be only superficial elements of the change process. This failure stems from the fact that the neo-liberal mindset that informs much current thinking is flawed in its understanding of the change process. Of central concern for this article is the fact that a new, damaging and largely unchallenged ideology, the ideology of ephemera, has evolved from this flawed thinking.

To explore this ideology we want to examine a number of conceptual areas beginning with a description of the new managerial ideology of ephemera. Argument will then move on to a cluster of issues – the paradox of contradictions, a brief anatomy of change, and a counter intuitive view of non-change – which will explore what change is and what some of its key dynamics are so that a counter balance to the ephemeral aspects of change can be established. As a result of this exploration, we have developed a new metaphor, the zone of entanglement, which we will examine to assist the development of better analyses of change. Finally, Germany, Italy and Russia offer some empirical grounding to the argument.

## The new managerial ideology of ephemera

The ideology of flexibility, restructuring, unfettered individual freedom, deregulation, discomfort as a precondition for promoting change, and that change is necessarily good, is intellectually stunted. It focuses only on the ephemeral, assuming that there are no enduring certainties, or worse, that things which are not ephemeral or do not change are road blocks on the superhighway to economic Nirvana. Unfortunately, intense focus on the ephemeral and ahistorical vision of society and change has become all too common. One classic example of an advocate of the ephemeral view is the popular management writer Tom Peters. A quick look at the aphorisms offered by Peters reveals a strong fetish for the ephemeral aspects of change in the commercial world.

Although Peters makes occasional statements to the effect that change must be put into context with stability and is aware to some degree of the kind of argument in favour of stability that will be put forward in this article, he is somewhat reckless in his studied avoidance of its inclusion in his analysis. The language used by Peters is evangelical and otherwise highly emotive, he talks of 'preaching a vision' (p 388),<sup>1</sup> he exhorts us to 'evaluate everyone on his or her love of change' (p 465), he warns us that 'the principal enemy is inertia' (p 467), and he pleads that 'a fair dose of change for change's sake ... is preferable to continued inertia' (pp 467–8). Propaganda for the new ideology is more than evident in Peters but how well has the academic literature guarded against it?

Compared to the rhetoric surrounding the notion of turbulence and the need for change, empirical studies of rates of change are relatively rare, although futurists such as Molitor<sup>2</sup> often cite growth rates in knowledge and technological change as an indicator of an incessant barrage of change. This kind of analysis masks a more complex milieu that is in fact comprised of both change and non-change. A complete analysis requires us to consider precisely what aspects of social and organizational life are changing and which are not. For example, while it is true that information technology becomes essentially obsolete within two years this does not mean that all aspects of a person's engagement with that technology is similarly obsolete. Updating skills required for learning new word processing packages requires updating syntactical information and awareness every two years. However, the meta-competencies of operating word processing systems have remained unchanged since their inception. Therefore, change at the meta-competence level is something in the order of decades rather than years.

<sup>1</sup> Tom Peters, *Thriving on Chaos: Handbook for a Management Revolution*, Pan Books, London, 1987.

<sup>2</sup> Graham Molitor, 'Speeding up information: technological change in the information era', <http://www.ibm.com/stories/1997/01/future4.html>, 1997.

Similarly, we can question the extent to which technology is a primary driver of change. For example, in an Australian study information technology change was ranked thirteenth as a source of change and accounted for only 6.4% of significant organizational changes in Australian companies.<sup>3</sup> Downsizing and organizational restructuring were involved in 67% of changes. Although technological change may have been an indirect factor in these organizational rationalizations it is equally plausible that restructuring was driven as much by the winds of organizational politics and market demands. How many of these restructurings were actually necessary and how many of them assisted their organizations to improve their capacity to survive is uncertain.

Thus, the turbulent environment which has become folklore in the organizational change literature has rarely been subjected to empirical validation. Whilst some aspects of society and culture have been subject to change at increasing rates, other aspects of society and culture are more resistant and stable. For example, class structures and their supporting hierarchies within organizations appear to have remained unchanged throughout the decades of the most eloquent pleas for organizational democracy. The changes in participation in most work places have been changes at the syntactical level rather than at the level of underlying process. We see then the turbulence as being a surface turbulence with deeper structures remaining largely immovable. Similarly, language and culture move at a much slower pace. For example, although the syntactics of popular music change from generation to generation the underlying rhythmic structures remain essentially the same, enabling crossover and communication between generations. Likewise, although changes in family and sexual behaviour were predicted during the 1960s, the tendency towards monogamous sexual partnerships continues largely unchanged. We would argue that the social and cultural work practices of work organizations also reflect much stability with core issues of sociability and equity remaining constant at the deep structural level.

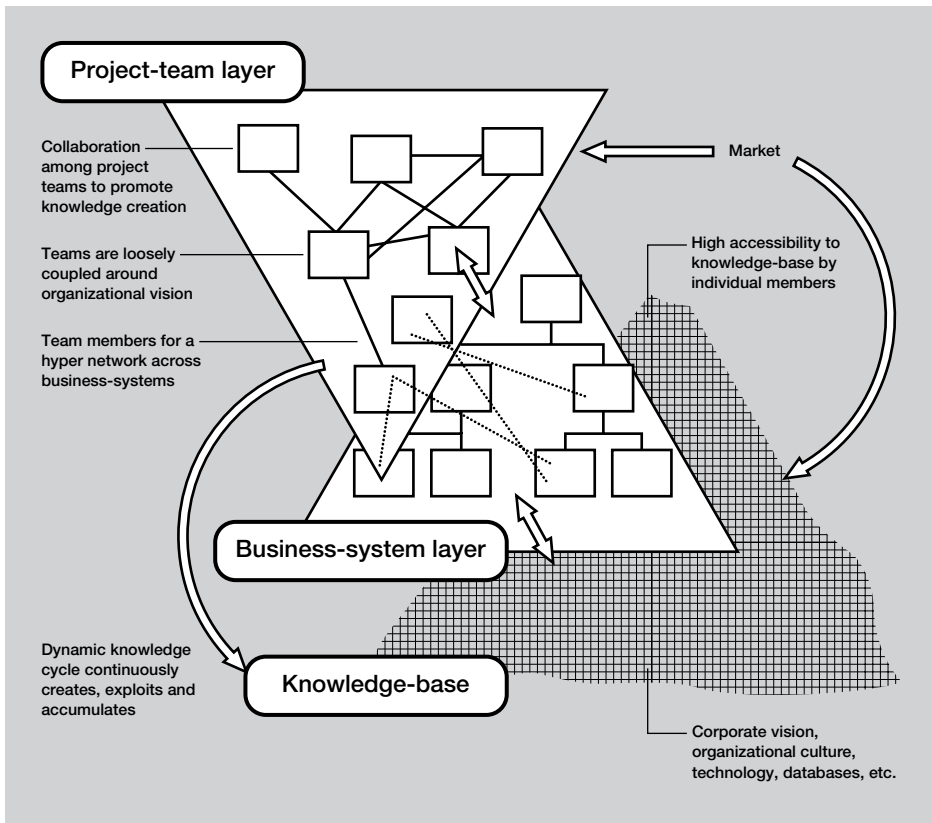
Nonaka and Takeuchi<sup>4</sup> have developed a model of change, called the Hypertext Organization, which is constructed with this kind of pattern in mind. It explains the ability of Japanese firms to innovate and change during the 1980s despite their reputation for inefficiency and inflexibility (see Figure 1). Briefly, the central layer of such an organization is its traditional, apparently change-resistant bureaucracy of systems, processes and hierarchies. The bottom layer is the historically accumulated knowledge base. These two layers can be taken to represent much of the deep, robust, slow-changing foundations of such an organization. The top layer, which may represent only a small fraction of the organization, is where radical changes and innovations are created. It is portrayed by Nonaka and Takeuchi as the site where flattened hierarchies, flexible work teams and so on are located. When change and innovation is created at this level and it is shown to be of benefit to the organization, it is fed back into the rest of the organization in the hope of achieving positive transformational change. This is a picture of organic change. It is a type of change which nourishes the body within which it occurs, respects the integrity of that body and ensures its long-term survival.

Our argument is, therefore, not meant to deny the importance of surface changes nor to decry attempts at deeper level change but rather to draw attention to the shallow rhetoric which all too often remains unanalysed in change management. It can be argued that a more accurate depiction of changing environments requires an analysis of the environment at different levels. In other words, a consideration of surface and deep structure as well as quantitative and qualitative appreciations are called for. Changing rates may not indicate changing meanings and vice versa; stable rates may obstruct important changes in meaning; as well, consideration needs to be given to non-linear changes. An example of an important non-linear change would be the sudden effects of the development of critical mass in use of information technology. Consequently, a sudden growth or rapid decline may punctuate a long period of stability. All of this is meant to point to a more complex picture of change than the ideologues of change allow for. Change is a complex system and the milieu that organizations face is comprised of stabilities and changes of different kinds.

<sup>3</sup> Robert Waldersee and Lesley Blackstock, 'Organizational change in Australia: what is really happening?', UNSW – Centre for Corporate Change, Working Paper No 37, AGSM 1993.

<sup>4</sup> Ikujiro Nonaka and Hirotaka Takeuchi, *The Knowledge Creating Company: How Japanese Companies Create the Dynamics of Innovation*, Oxford University Press, New York, 1995.

Figure 1 The Hypertext Organization



Source: Nonaka and Takeuchi, *op cit*, Ref 4.

The ideology of ephemera refuses to recognize this complexity. Instead it institutes a regime of assumptions and rewards which favour those with the intellectual and other capital to cope with change and the profound tyranny of uncertainty. Those without this capital are not on the trajectories of the evangelists and beneficiaries of ephemera, and have become invisible. The rise of anti-globalization and anti-change right wing political parties like Pauline Hanson's One Nation in Australia and the followers of leaders like Pat Buchanan in the USA are protests by those without the new capital. These protesters and reactionaries are typically poorly educated, middle aged or older, and live away from the main commercial centres. They feel angry, impotent and ignored. Although these people are negatively portrayed in the media as rednecks and other extremists who are out of step with the 'realities' of globalization, they are nevertheless representatives of a class of people who suffer because of the poor distribution of wealth, knowledge and opportunity. Furthermore, several reports show that even within the cities of Australia a growing gap between 'knowledge workers' and others is 'bestowing greater wealth and privilege on the most skilled and educated, while scuppering the job prospects and living standards of the less skilled'.<sup>5</sup>

As well, apparently jobs of the future are to be reserved for the holders of good MBAs, with the ability to be creative and to cope with rapid change because, as one managing director says, 'these days people only stay for five years before moving jobs'.<sup>6</sup> If our futures lie in this ephemeral scenario it is hard to imagine those futures as desirable.

5 Stephen Long, 'The future of work: a fractured nation', *The Australian Financial Review*, 24–25 October 1998, pp 21–23.

6 Jane Albert, 'Headhunters seek developed bodies', *The Weekend Australian*, 24–25 October 1998, p 47.

Fragmentation, inequality, conflict, alienation, oppression and exploitation will not be addressed. Those with the ability to promote and exploit change are apparently not ensuring equitable distribution of the profits of change. This suggests that the fears of the alienated are not without foundation.

Moreover, if we look closely at the prescriptions of the 'gurus' of ephemera we can see similarities with the rhetoric of the New Right – a rhetoric that appears to be instantly seductive to the most skilled and educated but which is, at heart, just a form of *laissez faire*. However, it is a more powerful form because it transcends the transaction economy and flows readily into the realm of the knowledge economy. Unlike the transaction economy, where the currency can be borrowed or stolen by those who lack it, the knowledge economy offers no such remedy to the needy.

The currently unfashionable research on social capital (eg Arrow,<sup>7</sup> Etzioni,<sup>8</sup> Putnam<sup>9</sup>) has shown the value of social characteristics not often associated with neo-liberalism – trust, cooperation and social cohesion in economic development – and consequently has been ignored because of the neo-liberal obsession with individualism. However, it is clear that much of the more recent evolutionary and complexity research (that is being selectively appropriated by the New Right) has in fact continued the thrust of the ignored social capital literature (eg Allen 1994,<sup>10</sup> Roberts and Sherratt,<sup>11</sup> Nowak and Sigmund<sup>12</sup>). This new literature indicates very clearly that cooperation and what Putnam calls associative structures are the keys to economic and social development. The neo-liberal appropriation of complex systems theory has simply down played these fundamental issues while using the rich metaphors for change that are so well articulated by the complexity theorists.

An emerging body of social research which has been done under the rubric of chaos, complexity and evolutionary theory (collectively complex systems research) is actually leading us away from the relatively one-dimensional neo-liberal model of change that Peters and his cohort evangelize. For example, even though Peters purports to use chaos theory he does so in a simplistic and incomplete fashion. In doing so, he has selectively used part of this body of theory to serve his ideological bent.

What is also of concern is that evolutionary economists (see for example, Paquet<sup>13</sup>), 'information' and 'communication' economists (see for example, Babe 1995<sup>14</sup>) and other scholars interested in positive social transformations through the application of complexity theory (see for example, Anderla, Dunning and Forge<sup>15</sup>) are unwittingly contributing to this narrow view of the world by not criticizing the ephemeral view.

The heart of this problem is not lack of flexibility, the need for radical restructuring and individual responsiveness, but the breakdown of civic assets, social cohesion and problems of distribution and equity. Neo-liberals and the evangelists of ephemera have only thrown limp, utopian theories at these issues and, not surprisingly, have only made things worse. We want to rethink the focus on the ephemera of change at the expense of deep historical understandings, re-emphasize the more enduring structures implicated in change, and consider the fact that stability needs to be incorporated into our dynamic models of change.

In the society of transactions, laws, contracts, interpersonal relationships and a host of other absolute and normative restraints, the postmodern economic and management tactics of the evangelists of ephemera seem destructive and unsustainable because they fail to satisfactorily account for those restraints. Furthermore, we argue that the ephemera view is intellectually lacking because its basis is political rather than analytical. It lacks a disciplined analysis of reality.

7 K. Arrow, *The Limits of Organization*, Norton, New York, 1974.

8 Antonio Etzioni, *The Moral Dimension: Towards a New Economics*, The Free Press, New York, 1988.

9 Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1993.

10 Peter M. Allen, 'Chaos and evolution in the social context', *Futures*, 26, 6, 1994, pp 583–97.

11 Gilbert Roberts and Thomas N. Sherratt, 'Development of cooperative relationships through increasing investment', *Nature*, 394, 9 July 1998.

12 Martin A. Nowak and Karl Sigmund, 'Evolution and indirect reciprocity by image scoring', *Nature*, 393, 11 June 1998.

13 Gilles Paquet, 'Evolutionary cognitive economics', *Information Economics and Policy*, 10, 1998, pp 343–57.

14 Robert Babe, *Communication and the Transformation of Economics: Essays in Information, Public Policy and Political Economy*, Westview Press, Boulder, 1995.

15 Georges Anderla, Anthony Dunning and Simon Forge, *Chaotics: An Agenda for Business and Society in the 21st Century*, Adamantine Press, Twickenham, 1997.

## The zone of entanglement

One of the core failures of the ephemera ideology resides in its inability to deal with complementary contradictions. A complex social system is full of contradictions: good and evil, rich and poor, strong and weak, order and disorder, trust and distrust. As we will show, it is the coexistence of these natural contradictions, and the diversity produced by the tensions arising from them that provides societies with the attributes from which they can draw to adapt to a changed environment. Therefore, it is normal and necessary for contradictory entities to coexist in complex systems; it is an easily observable characteristic of the real world. As Peterson says; life 'constitutes pockets of structure and purpose distilled from brews of endlessly jostling components...In all its complexity, life requires both stability and change.'<sup>16</sup>

These contradictions are not arranged as polarized relationships, as superficial analysts regularly assume; rather, they coexist in a system. This implies that at some points and on some occasions it may be difficult to disentangle the apparent contradictions as they come into contact with each other. To understand this better we have developed a new metaphor, the zone of entanglement. It is this zone of entanglement that is most interesting and powerful for developing an understanding of change and emergence.

For example, the zone of entanglement of competition and cooperation (which has been called 'co-opetition' by Anderla, Forge and Dunning 1997<sup>17</sup>), presents a more realistic description of 'real world' activity than one which contrasts the two. Strategic alliances, information sharing, and research and development consortia exist alongside price cutting, protection of intellectual property and rumour spreading, and are in fact two sides of the same coin – co-opetition. It is not enough to think in terms of competition or cooperation, it is the relationship between the two, or the interactions between them, that is the origin of an emerging economic system. It is possible, when seen in this new light, for a much more nuanced and sophisticated recognition of the real dynamics of competition and change to be outlined. This view may bring into focus a more complex set of behaviours than is possible when only those narrow, adversarial, and individualistic elements of reality are the central focus.

Further evidence of the limitations of ignoring activity at the zone of entanglement is seen in artificial and one-dimensional constructs such as economic rationality. This construct demands an assumption that glosses over communal rationality, and asserts that all human motivation is the same. If we accept this assumption we are forced to believe that diversity, unpredictability and contradictions in human activity do not exist. Such ideas are, in fact, central to the simplistic bipolar neo-liberal analysis of competition.

Worse still is that the sterile, unrealistic assumption of economic rationality is at the heart of this ideology. This ideology, at least theoretically, denies individuality while it glorifies individualism – an unhelpful contradiction. Here, there is no possibility of entanglement between individual motives and communal needs. In reality what comes from this entanglement includes innovation and leadership, as well as cultural conservation and social cohesion. The danger of devaluing and largely ignoring collective dynamics in analysis of economic behaviour, in favour of an obsession with individualism, is counter productive.

Examining the zone of entanglement of the broader concepts of change and non-change might also offer a more fruitful basis for analysis than separating them into binary opposites. To facilitate the development of such an approach, a brief discussion of the anatomy of change in which non-change is considered and defined is needed. This discussion will help to provide a more disciplined approach to analysis at the zone of entanglement of change and non-change.

## A brief anatomy of change

Arthur,<sup>18</sup> among others, has argued that positive feedback mechanisms are critical in determining the future. The argument is that the future of, for example, a business is

<sup>16</sup> Ivars Peterson, *The Jungles of Randomness: Mathematics at the Edge of Certainty*, Penguin, London, 1998.

<sup>17</sup> Anderla et al, *op cit*, Ref 16.

largely dependent on its past. Past success tends to feed future success as the strong get stronger. These positive feedback models are not without credibility because they can, for example, account for the huge profits and market dominance which have been derived from the ever-increasing returns to scale made by companies like Microsoft throughout the 1990s.

However, they too tell only part of the story. In the real world, we know that positive feedback mechanisms coexist with the contradictory mechanisms of negative feedback. In many respects, the 1990s have also been a decade of negative feedback economics and management with downsizing, cost cutting and budget balancing sprees occurring across the industrialized world. In common-sense terms, these models are contradictory because one adds energy to the system and the other removes energy, yet they naturally coexist. We also know that change can be radical (moving us into new states), like the change to a market economy and democracy in Russia, and change can be reactionary (moving us back towards old familiar states), like Malaysia retreating from de- and unregulated global financial markets.

The tension between change and non-change can be partly expanded in evolutionary terms. Evolutionary theory asserts that it is the environment that selects which novel genetic attributes are amplified through time and space. Conversely, we can say that it is not individual elements of the environment that select, but it is the system and the context within which change occurs that selects new behaviours and attributes. It is, therefore, the dense interconnecting relationships, or entanglements, between all the facets of the system (and with its broader environment) that are paramount in determining change.

These dense, interconnecting, inter-twining relationships are the key elements of self-organization (or adaptation), a process of communication, and information sharing which might be usefully looked upon as the nervous system and connective tissue of a society, or what Paquet calls coordination and orientation maps.<sup>19</sup> This connectivity also enables systems to achieve dynamic stability or self-referencing.<sup>20</sup> That is, it is a process of conservation, non-change, which may (paradoxically) stimulate the system, whilst the system retains coherence. In addition, because self-organizing systems depend on the communication and reception of information, it can be said that it is the interaction between parts of the existing system, to organize and reorganize within the parameters allowed for by self-referencing, which produces change.

Goodwin (pp 100–101),<sup>21</sup> too, conceives of this non-change process as an active one, calling it dynamic stability in robust order. This is a process in which a system's organizational characteristics and the individual variations (like mutating genes) produced in the individual components of the system, interact to produce change. Goodwin argues that it is simply too costly to explore the endlessness of possibility space (which is what would happen without self-referencing) in the hope of stumbling across the ideal new characteristics (genetic mutation) to perfectly suit the changed environmental conditions. Therefore, a process of mediation between environment and 'genes' to find a change that is 'good enough' (not necessarily optimal) is a more realistic evolutionary strategy.

Furthermore, an evolutionary view of the zone of entanglement of change and non-change suggests that we need to look not only at surface and deep structures but also to communicative networks at three levels:

1. a system-wide view (or macro level)
2. at multiple, or clusters of, entanglements of change and non-change variables (or mezzo level), and
3. at individual couples of variables (or micro level)

All three levels must be considered if we want to develop a dynamic understanding of change, bringing together environment and 'gene' in a unified analysis. This is a richer

18 W. Brian Arthur, 'Increasing returns and the new world of business', *Harvard Business Review*, July/August, 1996, pp 100–109.

19 Paquet, *op cit*, Ref 14.

20 Greg Hearn and Abraham Ninan, 'Communicative strategies and the evolution of organisations facing the new turbulence: information and communication technologies as problems and opportunities', *Prometheus*, 15, 1, 1997, pp 101–110.

21 Brian Goodwin, *How the Leopard Changed its Spots: The Evolution of Complexity*, Phoenix, London 1994.



metaphor than self-organization on its own (although it is complementary to it) because we need to consider more than the information transactions and organization at a system-wide level (which self-organization implies). Moreover, a zone of entanglement implies unpredictable synthesis; it involves a sense of creative friction, it is more organic, and it suggests a greater complexity to the individual interactions (rather than just a system-wide complexity).

Briefly then, a non-change mechanism is one that resists, regulates or dampens change from one state to any one of the other states of change. It is a state of conservation, friction or resistance to change that is derived from institutional, individual and other 'robust' entities whose inertia or resistance must be overcome for change to happen. In addition, non-change variables act to link the past and the present to the future. That is, they are points of continuity marking out the path of the arrow of time. However, non-change is not anti-change. Rather, it is change stripped of the narrow limitations which have come to be attached to change management. Moreover, non-change adds what might be some counter intuitive elements to popular notions of what change processes can mean. It thus opens the language of change management to allow more careful deconstruction of the change process.

In particular, it is a corrective to some analysts who have leapt onto the popular chaos theory bandwagon and have to a large degree misinterpreted the critical elements of non-change. Significantly, they have also seen non-change as static and have, therefore, ignored a key dynamic of complex systems. They see change as positive and anything that is not change as static, negative or not important because it is not progressive and is contradictory to change. Path dependence theory recognizes the role of history and social context in shaping the trajectories of change. However, it treats this process more like a passive filtering or sorting one (see for example, Paquet who makes it explicit that there is a filtering process at work<sup>22</sup>). That is, there is another way to see this process which assigns a less passive role to these historical and institutional variables.

Our argument casts non-change elements in an active capacity, that is, as selectors, coordinators, integrators, creators, initiators. Moreover, the notion of non-change as a key social dynamic can be exemplified in case studies of documented change in Germany, Italy and Russia.

## Germany, Italy and Russia

Germany, with its dense bureaucracy, pervasive 'big' government and cultural stability is a good example of the zone of entanglement of change and non-change. It is possible to view Germany's economic performance not as something which has happened despite its lack of adherence to the strictures of neo-liberal economic and managerial ephemera, but because it has not been seduced by them. What if a strong social spending regime, a strong tax revenue stream, and labour laws that promote a sense of certainty for workers have been part of the suite of national characteristics that have promoted Germany's undeniably strong economic position? That is, it may be that the strength and resilience of the economic structure is highly dependent on the depth of the social foundations that underpin them. Indeed, it is often noted that Germany has a strong communitarian tradition and highly normative (orderly and disciplined) society. This construction is certainly at odds with the new ideology and quite clearly, Germany's 'Sozialmarktwirtschaft (social market economy)...was originally conceived as an attempt to find a third way between purely market-oriented capitalism and socialism'.<sup>23</sup>

At the same time as the *Sozialmarktwirtschaft* has been constructed, Germany has undergone significant transformation – indeed, the construction of the *Sozialmarktwirtschaft* has itself been a remarkable transformation. Since the second world war the nature of German democracy, economic activity and self-image have been subject to much manipulation and profound change. Throughout the east-west division, the Marshall Plan and the post-reunification decade change and transformations have gone relentlessly ahead. In this light, calls during the 1998 German Federal election campaigns about the need for change and to shatter the pillars of non-change appear

22 Paquet, *op cit*, Ref 14, pp 353.

23 F. Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*, The Free Press, New York, 1995, p 218.

even more misguided because there has, in fact, been much change and willingness to change in Germany. Perhaps the extent of this change has not been recognized because it has not been the 'correct' type of change for the current ideological aesthetic. Furthermore, what if the extent of change has been made invisible to the neo-liberals, in part, because the depth of Germany's social foundations have allowed it to go ahead in a sustainable, unspectacular, organic way.

The issue of organic (often invisible) change is an important one to reflect on. If we use the zone of entanglement metaphor we may become more sensitive to this kind of change by not dividing change and non-change elements in an artificial analysis. In using such an approach, we make it easier to identify and value, and thereby resist the lure of ephemeral change. In particular, it is worth noting that there is a greater emphasis on emergence than on progress with our metaphor. In evolutionary terms, emergence is not the same as progress. Progress is teleological and loaded with simplistic cause-effect assumptions. With our metaphor, there is also the possibility of a stronger grasp of the linkage between determinism and emergence by incorporating deterministic chaos into analysis, rather than the postmodern ahistorical view of the ephemera evangelists. After all, it is difficult to deny that emergent change, no matter how complex and difficult to discern it is, has to emerge from something or somewhere. Emergent change has to have some cause, and so the ahistorical and teleological analysis will not do.

Putnam's<sup>24</sup> extensive study of social capital in Italy can also assist us in understanding this entanglement of change and non-change. Putnam contrasts north and south Italy in terms of economic performance and social capital accumulation. Stated crudely, Putnam's position is that north Italy, like Germany, is highly communitarian in nature and relatively successful and wealthy. In contrast, south Italy, which is relatively poor and unsuccessful, is characteristically restricted by patron-client chains, a far less communitarian ethic and weak associative networks. Interestingly, the south in many respects represents the social structures implicit in the ephemera ideology. Self reliance, weak government, and an ethos which regards laws as things to be broken – which echoes the ethos of the deregulation champions – are all variables Putnam has measured as key characteristics of the south.<sup>25</sup>

Part of the explanation for the different quality of life between north and south Italy is found in the observation that the north, the 'civic region', is typified by the fact that politicians are less likely to be approached by constituents for patronage and jobs (individualistic clients) and that they are more likely to be approached on policy (civic) issues. These politicians are also more likely to compromise to resolve conflicts; are more likely to support equity principles; and the citizens are more likely to dislike hierarchical authority patterns than in the south.<sup>26</sup> We see here both more complex self-organization and, because of the greater complexity, the possibility of more zones of entanglement at work. Communication, negotiation and compromise are bound to associative structures. From these more complex patterns of interaction/entanglement comes a better adapting and more successful community.

It is interesting to note that north Italy, with its modern democratic life, strong institutional framework, and broadly dispersed associative networks is, like Germany, at odds with the new ideology where strong government and institutions are pejorative terms. Important for our argument is that institutions also refer to 'secondary associations' which citizens have. That is, membership of sports clubs, literary circles, Rotary Clubs and other cultural and recreational associations which Putnam's research data shows are clearly more prolific and better attended in the north.<sup>27</sup> In the north, once again, it appears that a richer, more extensive web in which social/institutional, non-change variables interact with change variables to drive self-organization exists. A critical point we make is that stronger institutional frameworks in the north have not hindered change but helped it.

Furthermore, there are two different and historically deeply rooted change and non-change dynamics offering two change contexts in Italy. So deeply rooted are these contexts, that they can be clearly mapped since early Medieval times.

24 Putnam, *op cit*, Ref 9.

25 *Ibid*, pp 112–13.

26 *Ibid*, pp 100–105.

27 *Ibid*, pp 91–92.

*Social patterns plainly traceable from early medieval Italy to today turn out to be decisive in explaining why, on the verge of the twenty-first century, some communities are better able than others to manage collective life and sustain effective institutions.*<sup>28</sup>

The past is clearly a powerful force and equally clear is the profound sense of path dependence seen here. It is clear, too, that organizational adaptation, sustainability and institutions are conceived by Putnam as central to the change process. The pathological lack of deep and coherent associative structures and the ensuing lack of structural and social diversity and poorer economic performance seen in the south are, in fact, an historical predictor of social and economic ossification. This situation is further reflected in Putnam's overview of the unfolding of history:<sup>29</sup>

*History is not always efficient, in the sense of weeding out social practices that impede progress and encourage collective rationality. Nor is this inertia somehow attributable to individual irrationality. On the contrary, individuals responding rationally to the social context bequeathed to them by history reinforce the social pathologies.*

We see here the suggestion of positive and negative feedback – success breeding success and failure breeding failure. Implied in this overview is that *laissez faire* is insufficient because history (and even markets) will not allow 'the hand of God' to do the weeding. It is also clear that limitations of an abstract economic rationality are not enough to automatically lead to 'progress' either. Clearly, multiple classes of rationality and contexts add to the historical complexity and must be accounted for in any analysis of change. If history can be seen as the life story of a self-organizing system, the lesson might be that relationships, richness, diversity and complexity are what we need for healthy communities. Conversely, we can take it that ahistorical, simplistic and narrowly deterministic approaches to 'engineering' change are deeply flawed. This latter view of change could be said to be inorganic, the former organic. The ideology of ephemera, when seen in this light could easily become a social pathology because it can be seen to encourage dysfunctional societies.

A final brief example that sheds light on the change process is Russia, which has suffered two major historico-cultural dislocations this century – monarchy to communism, and communism to a democratic market economy – and which finds itself in serious trouble today. The communists dismantled the Tsarist political, economic and social structures, and replaced them with a new set. More recently, 'shock therapy' has seen the imposition of yet another political, economic and social order at the expense of those put in place by the communists. Alexander<sup>30</sup> argues that because of the removal of ordinary people from their historical context, values and frameworks through this compound dislocation, Russia is engulfed in a Nietzschean nihilism without traditional values.

This disconnectedness is only worsened by an injection of Western ideas of change. With no 'bedrock' of legal, constitutional and cultural structures for Russians there is confusion about how they are to understand their world. Indeed, Alexander's research shows an alarming collapse in Russians' ability to place appropriate values on education, technical training, artistic culture and many other more mundane concerns. With this deterioration is a loss of any reliable basis to develop expectations about and plan for the future. The capacity for organic change is absent and self-organization is dysfunctional. The thrown-together (rather than the co-evolved) constituent parts of the self-organizing system, when they entangle, create what is in evolutionary terms nonsense responses to environmental changes. There are no robust historical coordinating structures and there is no dynamic stability.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, p 121.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p 179.

<sup>30</sup> James Alexander, 'Uncertain conditions in the Russian transition: the popular drive towards stability in a "stateless" environment', *Europe – Asia Studies*, 50, 3, 1998, pp 415–43.

## Conclusion

The risks of the new ideology of ephemera are made clear in this analysis. Change is a complex and difficult thing and the cavalier attitudes of the evangelists of change to it are dangerous. As already stated, our conjecture is that non-change has been misunderstood because it does not have the appearance of being a process, a dynamic, or a stimulus. It is, after all, counter intuitive to think of it as having any of the attributes of activity. Yet, we argue that it is a dynamic of change. As a consequence, there is a need to examine the non-change dimension of dynamical systems and to rethink its meaning and role so that the dangers of silencing this critical element are more obvious.

Furthermore, it is interesting to reflect on the idea that history which is, it would seem, the very antithesis of the central concerns of the ephemera evangelists is so important. Thus, institutions with their deep historical roots are often regarded as impediments to change, but our argument is that they are non-change variables which are part of the necessary inventory of entangling entities. Thus, elements of organizations thought to be change resistant are better thought of as change selectors. They are not to be obliterated but rather understood as the infrastructure of sustainable evolution.

The homogenous milieu of change that is assumed in the change literature has been found wanting. Our response has been to argue that there are surface (syntactical) levels and deep structural levels of change. Therefore, an assessment of the role of, for example, institutions in change must be aware of which level of change is being examined. In fact, the zone of entanglement metaphor allows us to re-emphasize the importance of non-change variables as active change agents.

Although this work is highly speculative it provides a point of departure to revitalize debate about change by counter balancing the ephemera fad. We doubt we have in fact proved the non-change case. However, we will claim success if the challenge to debate the ephemera fad is taken up by others.