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Maker's Perceptions of Managing Change in  
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# Between Planned and Emergent Change: Decision Maker's Perceptions of Managing Change in Organisations

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*Abstract: Today's business environment is increasingly complex, interconnected, unpredictable and competitive. Within this context decision makers struggle to find some stability amidst uncertainty using planned change methods while being aware of the need for flexibility and agility to leverage emergent change and survive. It is this tension between the desire for continuity and the experience of emergence in change processes that this paper addresses. To examine this tension the paper contrasts the planned organisational change methods used by decision makers since the 1950s with the more recent emergent change approaches developed out of economic destabilization and increased competition. The paper is based on a qualitative research project that used relevant organisational documents and in-depth interviews with 14 highly placed decision makers involved in change efforts in different organisations to explore different experiences and understandings of change. The stories told show a rich picture of organisational change efforts as well as individual understandings and insights. The experiences transmitted by the different decision makers illustrate the tension between planned and emergent change. The language they use however, leads to the conclusion that a 'becoming view' on change combining both continuity and emergence could help to eliminate the paradox.*

Keywords: Organisational Change, Organisational Becoming, Decision Makers, Qualitative Studies, Narratives

## Introduction

**O**RGANISATIONS ARE BECOMING increasingly aware of their connectedness to each other and to their global environment. As the global context of business becomes more complex, competitive, unpredictable (Kanter, 1999, p.8) and difficult to manage, organisational change efforts need to be re-evaluated. To survive amidst such rapid connectivity and complexity, organisations need to balance their traditional, planned, structural change methods with the unpredictability and emergence of new approaches traditionally conceived of as polar opposites (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek, 2009).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century has been hailed as one of unprecedented change. Business has never been conducted on such a global collaborative scale (Kanter, 1999:7) or such speed. Today's widespread, fast-moving and complex change is inherently emergent and unpredictable. "We basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like, except that it will be different, more complex, more fast-paced, and more culturally diverse" states Schein (2004, p. 393). A 2008 IBM study suggests that "organisations today view themselves less

and less as stable and enduring institutions, and more and more as ‘work in progress’ subject to continuing and continuous change” (Burns, 2006:362).

The idea of change as continuous (Chia, 1999; Tsoukas and Chia 2002; Weick and Quinn, 1999) is becoming more prevalent and yet change is still often experienced by practitioners as disruptive or disequilibrating and related to resistance, loss of security and fear of uncertainty. It is thus represented as a potential pitfall to the organisation’s survival or internal sustainability. How can these seemingly competing perspectives come together? The conjuncture examined in this paper is the need for a different approach to change: namely the concept of organisational becoming in which both continuity and emergence are considered.

Within this context leaders and decision makers find themselves with the need to connect both planned change initiatives and emergent -unplanned- changes. This paper is based on a qualitative study carried out with 14 decision makers from 12 different organisations. The decision makers were interviewed about their day-to-day experiences and perspectives on change and continuity. The results from the analysis suggest that in their daily practices decision makers intuitively use both frameworks to make sense of uncertainty. The paper is organised as follows. The first two sections review planned and emergent change theories while the third section elaborates on the research methodology and the participants in the study. The fourth section presents the results of the interview and document analysis evolving around different worldviews, people and change as well as the tension illustrated in the first two sections. The results are discussed in the final section elaborating an ‘organisational becoming’ view on change before the presentation of some conclusions.

## **From Planned to Emergent Organisational Change**

Traditional planned change management strategies involve sequential steps for altering organisational and individual behaviour. This method is typically employed once decision makers identify a need for change (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek, 2009; Burns, 2006) after analysing the environment’s inhibiting and enabling forces (Burns, 2005). Lewin (1951) the father of planned change in organisation studies, developed the three stage model that has become the classic way of thinking about change in organisations. The model was based on field theory, group dynamics and action research. As such, change involves pre-prescribed, group based steps aimed at a goal. Lewin’s model prevalent from the 1950s until the economic instability of the 1970s called it into question (Burns 2006:328) continues, however, to underpin many change efforts today (Dent and Goldberg Galloway, 1999; Burns, 2006:34). As Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek point out “conscious, planned change [is seen] as infinitely preferable to unconscious, emergent change” (2009: 11).

Lewin suggests in his model a progression through three semi-stable stages to balance inhibiting and enabling environmental forces that call for change. The first stage is unfreezing where unhelpful behaviour needs to be made explicit and disconfirmed; concrete change needs also have to be identified. The next stage is change or ‘moving’, where through trial-and-error, research style action the change slowly gets implemented. Once a suitable change is identified and implemented, the refreezing stage begins; its objective is to embed the new changes in a state of quasi equilibrium so they are learned and assimilated enough to be maintained in the future. The refreezing stage requires behaviours to be consistent with the personality, behaviour, and environment of those involved (Schein, 2004). Today, change

is taking place at such speed that is nearly impossible to align new behaviours to environmental demands before they actually change (Esain *et al*, 2008:21; Nicholson, 2000).

Due to its focus on group involvement and trial-and-error testing, planned change initiatives are often criticized as slow, static and only suitable for times of stability, not dynamic inter-relatedness and complexity (Dawson, 1994; Hatch and Cunliffe, 2006; Kanter, 1999). McKendall (1993) and Hatch and Cunliffe (2006) also suggest that planned change can be an unethical, fear-producing “vehicle for domination” (In Burns, 2006:146) that extends existing top-down power structures. Lewin recognized that change could be initiated from anywhere (Lewin, 1951), but expected it to occur within the given change framework. This approach has also been criticised for ignoring environmental factors that are inconsistent with planned change initiatives (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek, 2009; March, 1994). This is especially true in our increasingly complex, interconnected and global corporate world.

The criticism of planned change efforts is not unfounded. Failure rates tend to be very high, up to 70% (Sackmann *et al*, 2009). Kotter (1995) identifies eight reasons planned change efforts fail. These include failure to establish adequate urgency to change, an insufficiently powerful guiding coalition, a missing, blocked or under communicated vision, failure to create short term wins, declaring victory too soon and not anchoring changes in the corporation’s culture. Recent research adds difficulty negotiating conflicting group identities (McInnes *et al*, 2006), leadership behaviour problems and inertia deriving from a company resource position (Kraatz and Zajac, 2001) as well as failure to appreciate organisation-environment interdependencies and connectivity (Sackmann *et al*, 2009). Increasing complexity requires organisations “to rethink the nature of hierarchy and control, learn the art of managing and changing contexts, promote self-organising processes, and learn how to use small changes to create large effects” (Burns, 2005:82; Checkland, 1981)

As Weick (2000) suggests, planned change efforts often get the credit in decision makers’ eyes for successes in delivering new strategies for survival, but they rarely change the organisation’s underlying nature and problems usually recur. Planned change has been found to be most suitable when there is an anticipated need for structural changes (Sackmann *et al* 2009; Burns, 2005). Structural changes alone however, are not sufficient to guarantee organisational learning or the sustainability of change efforts. While planned change efforts often focus on diminishing the restrictive environmental forces, emergent change efforts focuses on identifying the enabling forces and enhancing them (Livene-Tarandach and Bartunek, 2009:13). The sustainability of change is achieved through the latter. The next section will explore some of the current theories on emergent change.

## **Emergent Change**

Emergent change is described as unpredictable, often unintentional, can come from anywhere, and involving relatively informal self-organising (Weick and Quinn, 1999). It is also iterative. Change emerges simultaneously as actors organise work in given structures and it involves improving the existing enabling conditions in the organisational environment (Stacey, 1992). As Stacey (2005) suggests most organisations these days operate at the ‘edge of chaos and far-from-equilibrium’ with instability and stability intertwined and difficult to separate. As natural systems, organisations need to learn to operate within these conditions since too much stability and control will cause the organisation to become unresponsive to its environment and decline (Stacey, 2001). As Burns argues, disequilibrium is a necessary condition

for the growth of dynamic systems (Burns, 2006:149). Change becomes conceptualised then as continuous and emergent (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Stacey, 1992, 2005; Burns, 2006).

Emergent change occurs 'in real time' (Burns, 2006:363) and therefore fosters ongoing re-alignment with the environment, ongoing learning and strategy making. Further benefits of emergent change are:

“Sensitivity to local contingencies; suitability for on-line real-time experimentation, learning and sense-making, comprehensibility and manageability; likelihood of satisfying needs of autonomy, control, and expression; proneness to swift implementation, resistance to unraveling; ability to exploit existing tacit knowledge; and tightened and shortened feedback loops from results to action.” (Weick 2000:225).

Emergent change theories emphasize the processual nature of organising (Hosking and Morley, 1992). Thus the way people's interactions lead to unpredictable outcomes and difficulties in predicting and therefore planning *beforehand* the path that change initiatives will take. One such example is the volunteer group that sprung up spontaneously after the destruction of the World Trade Center in 9/11 (Voorhees, 2008; in Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek, 2009). Volunteers developed a new pattern for coordinating action after the need for doing so was explicitly recognised and accepted. A further example is the innovation processes as explained by Kanter (1999:18) where customers, suppliers and venture partners become all 'important sources of innovation'. Through the use of new technologies (e.g Facebook, Twitter) organisations are starting to leverage stakeholders input quickly and effectively. This feedback however, is largely unpredictable and might lead to the recognition of felt need for change in a direction that the company had not considered before.

These examples suggest that change interventions need to go beyond the episodic change formulated by Kurth Lewin's defreeze-change-refreeze model to incorporate notions of emergence, emergent developments<sup>1</sup> and self-organisation. A number of recent research projects have aimed to understand the interplay between planned and emergent change (Cunha and Cunha, 2003; Burns, 2005; Sackman et al 2009). Beer and Noria (2000) advocate the use of planned and emergent change processes concurrently.

In practice, planned change often produces unintended consequences and relations that lead to non-linear emergent change (Beer and Nohria, 2000). Styhre (2002) provides an example of a Swedish telecommunication company whose planned attempt to implement a new manufacturing unit was derailed by an unanticipated recession that thwarted their original plans and transformed them into a more emergent approach to change. Cunha and Cunha (2003:445) also discuss the socialist Cuban government's planned, top-down regulatory change being combined successfully with emergent, entrepreneurial efforts that incorporate Western management techniques in such a way that “agents and structure interact to produce the social innovations required in the face of environmental change”.

However, to view organisations as non-linear systems requires also a reconceptualization of the role of leaders and decision makers (Burns, 2005:82). “Leaders should not longer be considered...solely as initiators and implementers of pre-planned organisational change; nor should they be seen...solely as reactive agents to emergent change forces. Rather they should develop the ability to connect the two to create synergy.” (Livne-Tarandach and Bartunek, 2009:28). According to the literature on leadership and change, decision makers would need

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<sup>1</sup> *Emergence* denotes properties of a whole that cannot be transferred to its parts, whereas *emergent developments* refers to unanticipated events.

to become facilitators and supporters of change rather than simple controllers or enforcers of planned change initiatives if they are to engage their employers (Schulist, 2000:20; Goshal, 2005:89). As 'change agents' they would be suited to enable tolerance of the unknown and the coping with paradoxes that emergent change usually brings about (Weick, 2000; Stacey et al, 2002; Scharmer, 2007, 2008) while managing anxiety (McKendall, 1993) and supporting the emergent change (Kanter, 1999).

## Methodology

It is the tension between continuity and change and how it is represented and lived by decision makers in organisations that this research aims to explore. The challenge of exploring these experiential processes led us to use a research design based on relevant organisational documents and in-depth qualitative interviews to surface unknown representations and personal experiences. It was anticipated that in organisations change initiatives are introduced and handled mainly from the top down. It is managing directors and department leaders who take final decisions regarding which project gets financed or whether to buy another company or not. They are furthermore in a good position to shape and influence the daily life of their employees (McKelvey, 1994:320; Smirchich and Morgan, 1982). Decision makers are therefore considered to be in a powerful position to both manage changes and to shape the reality of their employees and their organisations (Schein, 2004; Lindstead *et al*, 2009). Thus, we selected 14 participants in formal leadership positions or clearly identified as decision makers from different organisations to get a sense of the different type of change stories that might occur in a variety of organisational contexts.

The semi-structured interviews were designed to bring forth stories about the decision makers experiences and perceptions of organisational change by giving leeway to the interviewee through open-ended questions, genuine engagement, avoiding interruptions but asking clarifying questions or following up on certain topics that emerged. For example, we asked questions about the kind of change processes they have been involved in -e.g. planned or emergent-, the actions they were involved in during those change events – e.g. support internal coherence -, the sense-making criteria applied and their interpretation of the long term impact of those changes in their organisation.

The project started in February 2009 and terminated in August 2009. Access to possible interviewees was obtained using direct and indirect approaches within the researchers wider networks as well as outside their networks: direct access (e.g. organizations the researchers worked at before), indirect access (the researchers knew someone who worked in the organization), third party access and getting access without prior established contacts. The following table gives an overview of the participant's industries and position. All names used in the paper are aliases, though they reflect the gender of the participant.



**Table 1: Participants & Organisational Stratas**

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Size*</b>	<b>Position</b>	<b>Function</b>
Andy	Bank	300	CEO	
Bob	Insurance	4.5	Department head	Global HR
George	Hospital management	6.28	Department head	Quality development
Harriett	Non-governmental public body	850	Department head and change project manager	Enquiries
James	Pharmaceutical	80	Change manager	People development
Mia	Charity	100	Department head	Evaluation
Matt	Accountancy services	0	Department head	People development
Monica	Charity	100	Department head	Families at risk
Paula	Independent consultant	1	Self-employed	Facilitator and environmentalist
Peter	Investment bank	5.62	Department head	equity
Sebastian	Newspaper publisher	710	CFO	Finance and HR
Simon	Fair trade shop	5**	General Manager	
Silvia	NGO	15	Department head	Global HR & OD
Steve	NGO	15	Department head	Strategy & policy
*approximation of number of employees of whole organisation				
** in shop; association of 88 shops				

The interviewees were generally open, reflective and willing to make time for the conversation. As a result all interviews took between 50 and 90 minutes and were tape recorded. Subsequently the interviews were transcribed without correcting grammatical errors, indicating breaks of thinking or laughter. Passages unrelated to the research topic and the analysis were not transcribed (Flick, 2005; Kowal and O'Connell, 2005).

Talking about organisational change means being aware of the context in which change happens, the actors involved in it and the chain of actions; thus ultimately being able to construct a story. Telling stories is a primary way of relating and making meaning in everyday life (Gabriel, 2000). In telling stories about people or events we enact and organise ourselves especially in times of uncertainty (Bruner, 1991). Stories make persuasive and legitimate particular ways of seeing the world and treating evidence, becoming the type of knowledge necessary to make sense of a shifting reality (Bruner, 2008). Furthermore, stories offer the space to bridge gaps and elisions, incorporating the new and potentially threatening while creating continuity and commonality of reference (Bruner, 1996). They are therefore particularly useful to present a dynamic view of how decision makers made sense of change events in this research.

The paper draws mainly on the stories told by 14 highly placed decision makers that had experienced and managed major changes in their jobs. The analysis of the stories they told aimed at surfacing the different ways they think about change and make sense of it (Weick, 1995) as well as to explore the different practices they engage in to manage change. The data was analysed in two different steps. The first step sought to identify the activities, experiences, and change processes each decision maker had been involved in. It consisted of multiple readings of the interview transcripts and documentation for the identification of everyday activities, experiences, and events. These were initially coded following the two main research questions: perspective *-weltanschauung-* in regard to change and characteristics of the change experienced. The second step analysed more in depth three key topics related to change that emerged in the first analysis: people and change, continuity and emergence in change processes and organisational becoming. The first two topics emerged as a result of the interviews' analysis while the third was provided by the literature review. As a result of the analysis a number of stories about change were extracted and reconstructed. The following section explores those stories.

### **Making Sense of Change: the Decision Makers' Experience**

None of the participants had difficulties in finding examples of change both planned and emergent. Andy, Bob and Peter mentioned losses in one section of their businesses as the equity market collapsed. Matt talked about changes as response to the crisis. However, many change examples were unrelated to the current economic turmoil. George, for example, reported the merging of two radiology departments into one and the reorganisation of the children cardiology centre. Mia and Monica shared the cultural change induced 3 years ago: with new leadership, a stronger academic focus and different projects beyond the organisation's core field. The set-up of a joint venture with another newspaper publisher is the challenge that Sebastian and his colleagues are mastering. James talked about a take-over of another pharmaceutical firm and internal structural changes. Silvia and Steve addressed changes following the alteration of the strategy in their organisation. Harriett shared insights from a pervasive restructuring project. Simon's shop concept and location was changed and last but not least Paula presented a view on organisational change by sharing experiences from her work as facilitator and environmentalist.

### ***Weltanschauung in Respect to Change***

Decision makers make sense of change using different theoretical conceptualizations of its characteristics. These different perspectives on change frame decision makers' efforts to understand and explain change situations. Steve, for example, explained change in a 'soft system' way (Checkland and Scholes, 1990): *'The organisation has a lot of different components and the organisation is complex, so if you change one piece, all the other pieces do not fit any more.'* Silvia and Bob presented a slightly more 'hard system approach' (Checkland, 1981) defining a clear result at the beginning and analysing the best way of getting there. Matt's view on *'human nature has never changed'* reflects more aspects of an 'evolutionary psychology' approach (Nicholson, 2000). Paula's account, on the contrary, provided analogies to complexity theory and emergence (Stacey, 1992; Scharmer, 2007): *'The approach that I am trying to bring alive in the organisation is one of profound listening. Kind of emergence, (...) as the plan unfolds and starts to be implemented you of course need to change the plan because you will discover that stakeholders are not as you thought they would be'*.

Despite the different approaches used to make sense of change, there were a number of common perspectives among all the decision makers interviewed. For instance, cultural change and its difficulties (Schein, 2004) was addressed by many, in particular Mia. Another recurring statement in the interviews was the meeting of the demands from the market by external adaptation, like Peter's *'Our clients are a very good sounding board for us, we are tuned into them.'* A further commonality in all interviews was the tension between trying to plan change but having to manage some of its emergent properties.

*'Well if I am wearing the strategy hat then we have a clear strategy. And strategy is not something that you set up once and you forget about it. We now really work almost annually adjusting, refining, setting targets all around our strategic directions, getting these targets very clear. Now we have got 15 key areas where we have set our targets and that is across the organisation. (...) We are fairly conservative, we are not doing radical change very quickly, there is a lot of foundation of the last 60 years in place. Strong founding principles, strong founder culture. So there is a lot keeping us stable. You could also say an elephant: it is usually something big, stable, solid that is moving forward not too quickly but moving forward and it is reliable and it is not breaking down.'* (Steve)

*'[but] some of it happens a lot more quickly than you would have ever expected particularly around the IT side. This shift, we knew there was a shift coming with the digital art, we knew there was a shift to online processing of forms and all that things and the technology has moved on so quickly if actually you spent two years designing a system it is out of date before you have actually implemented it.'* (Harriett)

Dealing with emergent change is little understood, there is however evidence that participants try to come to terms with it. Indeed, planning seems to be the dominant coping strategy to tackle the ongoing, unpredictable aspects of change.

*'I would like to plan it, but it is not possible. (...) We have grown very fast over the last years, and when you grow very fast you have to deal with the organisation and the*

*processes. So when you grow you do not have the time to organise everything well so you improvise. Once you have time after the growth you should take time to organise. (...)How should I say, you can see some changes coming, and some you cannot see. If you think all day what could happen next and hit us you are getting crazy. So I think you should try to see some development and be ready for the change that they cause but you will never be able to see all these developments. (...)Both, some changes have to take place sudden, and some changes go slowly, sometimes you do not recognise them as a change, but looking back it was a change; I think both and I think it depends on the situation.' (Sebastian)*

In accordance to the questions asked around ongoing or emergent change and predicting or planning change below shows the different positions the participants voiced explicitly. Change is usually described as somehow predictable (through strategy) but unpredictable at the same time, for instance as Bob explains:

*'So if my territory is bigger than the opportunity that you have an area that is a problem or that needs change is in process of change is obviously more likely.(...) you have to [plan change], I mean you have your strategies that anticipate your change. When you do your strategy, when you do your budgeting, when you do your planning cycle which is usually a three years cycle, what do you do? You set some parameters, what are the parameters, these are best guesses, these are targets that you set yourself mid-term then you have to discuss how you want to get there.(...) or we wait to see what happens and then adjust.(...) But change itself is definitely an ongoing issue. Whoever believes that something is set in stone, may be dead already. Because it simply does not work.'* (Bob)

All participants viewed change as greatly ongoing. The subsequent table includes views of change elicited from the examples that they shared with us. The table shows that even if some participants did not consider change consciously as emergent they nevertheless described it as ongoing yet planable.

Table 2: Change Matrix Elicited from Data\*

	Seb	Har	Mon	Sim	And	Bob	Mat	Jam	Mia	Pet	Pau	Sil	Ste	Geo
emergent														
unplanable														
episodic														
Predictable														
unpredictable														
incremental														
Sudden														
planable														
Ongoing														

\*dark squares . . explicit description of change: light squares . . implicit description of change

This apparent contradiction, the use of diverging attributes (e.g. continuous change therefore emergent yet predictable through planning) to describe their experiences may be explained

by the theory of cognitive polyphasia (Moscovici, 1975). The theory contests that conflicting ideas can coexist as explanations for a single phenomenon within on person or community (Jovchelovitch, 2007). As a result decision makers are able to use different (culturally available) change theories or frameworks when it comes to making sense of their own change experience.

### **People and Change**

A common theme emerging in the decision makers stories was the link between people and change. According to the emerging stories in all change processes people need to be convinced, told and reminded of changes. Employees are expected to resist, be very uncomfortable with uncertainty and be anxious about loss of security. Valuable insights in this respect were shared by Monica and Sebastian.

*‘ I found it personally quite stressful when change came over me and I was not in charge of it, (...) to be actually the recipient of change was absolutely horrible. ’ (Monica)*

*‘ I mean some few people like when there is change every day and every day is different than the other. But most of us try to get a little bit of routine, so not every business day is a surprise for you. And when you live in times like that, where the change around you goes very fast and you have the change inside too, not all people can deal with this. ’ (Sebastian)*

And yet, regardless of the awareness of the pain resulting from imposed change initiatives there were few examples of decision makers allowing for their employees’ participation in designing changes or giving space and time to deal with it. Yet, some like Matt mentioned that employee’s points of views do inform his decision making and Steve shared the bottom up enquiry of various stakeholder groups that influenced the strategy design. Some further evidence that employees are sometimes incorporated at diagnose, design and implementing stages of change could be found in Peter’s account of talking constantly about and with people.

*‘ But it is just continuo us talking and active listening . One other thing that we have to think about is more empowerment in terms of some of the guys right up in the organisation believe that they are the only ones who can make informed decisions. We need to find a better way to empower, not necessarily the management but key people within the business, so that they have faith and trust in them. ’ (Peter)*

In general, decision makers describe experiences where they have learned to embrace change or even thrive on change. But they do not seem to trust their own employees possessing that capacity and therefore change programs are usually presented as having to be ‘ directed and imposed ’. It is not clear if the ascribed difficulties presented by employees and their resistance to changes are not a result of this form of mistrust and miscommunication. As Beckhard (in Senge, 1999) also suggests *‘ people do not resist change; people resist being changed ’*.

### ***The Tension Between Continuity and Emergence***

Although change is described as mainly ongoing, there were certain aspects of the way themselves or their organisations work, that decision makers consider to have changed very little. Examples are the credit rating process mentioned by Bob or the way the service is delivered in Andy's Bank: *' We take deposits, we advance credit, and we look after their wealth. There are not any signs of changing today. '* Other aspects that decision makers consider need to be maintained stable in their organizations are as varied as financial security and independence, work by consensus, continuity of leadership, processes aligned to a clear vision; think ahead, the loyalty of employees or the continued investment in people: *' Besides the financial side we are deliberately not announcing, have not and will not, stuff cuts across the board. '* James emphasised the importance of openness for change. The importance of being close and attuned with clients as well as communicating with staff has been identified as crucial but challenging. A quite distinct factor was mentioned by George: *' ontological security, a trust in oneself to cope with whatever comes up. '*

These 'need to maintain' aspects can be subsumed in four categories: First, processes which present the core competence and purpose of the organisation; second, values and ethics around ways of working; third communication; and fourth as George says *' ontological security '*. So, although change is ongoing and that is in general positive there are aspects that need to remain the same or as close to stable as possible.

There is a tension expressed in the stories between the reality of change as an ongoing, emergent phenomena and the desire to maintain stable certain aspects of work decision makers consider necessary for doing a good job or running a good organisation or team. This tension is reflected in change stories that talk about the prevailing reality of ongoing change and at the same time use of coping strategies based on rational/planned concepts to cope with/and tame the emergent nature of change:

*' Our strategies, which in 2001 was the first time we wrote it down. And we wrote down what we were doing for centuries. And we are presenting it to all staff next week and our strategy has not changed.[...]Yes we have changed a lot, every year we change a lot. It is very hard to spot as it happens incrementally. '* (Andy)

*' The way the strategic target has been operationalised and how it is going to be cascaded down and implemented has led in the past to some confusion and also discussion on how things should be done and I would say it was a little bit of a power struggle of where the power should lay. (...) but of course we will involve our people in the continents. '* (Silvia)

*' I am always trying to have an organisation that fits to the goal and at the moment I am doing this again and again and one day I am going into this direction and next day into another direction...I am always trying to have a stable basis for doing our business. At the moment there is a lot of change a lot of uncertainty, so that is not the things that I like. [...] I think at the end of the day nobody knows what will happen. Maybe sometimes it is worth the time thinking about it and writing it down, but you should not think that this will make it easier or predictable what will happen. '* (Sebastian)

Thus, change is experienced as ongoing but there is a desire to maintain certain aspects of work/organization 'unchanged'; sometimes it is described as predictable but then there is recognition that certain events are impossible to anticipate; change is explained as a common effort where everyone needs to be involved but then only selected individuals should be taking decisions and use persuasion to cascade down changes; or certain processes are seen as unchangeable in a team constantly searching for ways of improving processes. These paradoxical ways to live and conceptualise change captures the adherence to rational, clear and controllable frameworks to make sense of change processes that are being experienced as complex, blurred and emergent and in a sense threatening. The reaction sometimes is one of denial.

*' Where we do not change, and where you CANNOT change is on the product side. If certain processes, investment processes, you may have to do some adaptation, but the process of how a company is selecting stock, how a company is making their investment decisions for their portfolios for their funds, there change is dangerous, because what they have to deliver is consistency. The company has changed. But certain things you should not change if this is a crucial thing to make your business successful. '* (Bob)

And yet, this tension between stability, security and emergence can be seen as a way of enabling interaction among employees and decision makers (Carlson, 2006; Fisher, 1984), as well as a way to deal with the 'thrownness condition' (Weick, 2003). As Hernes and Weick (2007a) suggest, change does not oppose stability but rather both coexist and magnify each other. In this sense it can be argued that changeability increases proportionally within the organisation by retained unchanged aspects. The more people can trust in their core competencies and processes, the easier it is to let go of other things. The retained unchanged factors can prevent people from 'getting nervous or panicky about the continuity of change' (George) as they give a sense of direction, reliability and the means to take part and make sense. This is explored more in depth in the next section.

### **Organisational Becoming**

Organisational becoming as a term was not coined in any interview but all fit in: Some interviewees' accounts could be interpreted as more widely matching the principles discussed below, like Peter, Steve, George and Paula's, in others tendencies could be identified. For Paula change is about involving people, getting them to think, share and not knowing all the answers at the beginning. Change is ongoing and results show over time. There is interdependence between the organisation and the environment and people have agency. Additionally Peter's account reflected a high degree of self-organisation within his organisation and openness to people issues. Harriett says about changes 'my instinct is it should not be a change project but a project that delivers something else, hopefully embedded, you see something that does not work and you change it'.

Matt adds to that '(...) as a concept change is something that I would instil in my team as something that is constant and ongoing (...) you cannot always predict specific circumstances but you can create an environment where you can then respond in a really constructive and positive way.' All interviewees desire a culture of change that embraces change as something constant but also positive.

This language resonates very much with recent attempts of revisiting the concept of organisational change in the literature, precisely aiming at bringing it more in line with recent developments in organisations. For instance Chia (1999) picks up on the primacy of a changeable and emergent world according to Heraclitus and how the overruling of this paradigm resulted in people today feeling more comfortable with a static world or organisations in equilibrium (1999:214). He argues for a renaissance of Heraclitus's worldview and an endogenous process view and bases his work on a 'rhizomic'<sup>2</sup> model of change and transformation (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988). He suggests moving away from a linear logic of organising towards complexity and chaos theory stressing the struggle between a dynamic (natural) world and the intent to stabilize it through organising (Chia, 1999:224).

Tsoukas and Chia's (2002) work also suggests treating change as the normal condition of organisational life (2002:267) rather than as the exception as local adaptation or microscopic change go on all the time (2002:580). They suggest that this 'organisational becoming' emerges both out of interactions with the outside world and due to the fact that humans interact with their own thoughts (2002:573). Thus as decision makers we are aware of ourselves in action, where our thoughts alter our behaviour as we act and vice versa. As a result, the suggestion is for considering change processes as constantly changing; yet, since not all local adaptations will become institutionalised some stability will remain.

Weick and Hernes (2007b) extend this idea through their work on the stability-change paradox in parallel to the individual-organisation debate based on Whitehead's process philosophy. They suggest disentangling this dichotomy and proclaiming 'novelty' rather than change as an appropriate term in regard to organisational becoming. They emphasise order as a driver for becoming rather than opposing it. They suggest that what keeps people in motion is the desire for an order that ultimately never will be achieved. They use for their argument the dimensions of actuality and potentiality, on the one hand, and experience and abstraction, on the other. Bringing the two dimensions together organisations are ever-becoming, '*between concrete experience and abstraction, guided by the principles creativity, actuality and potentiality*'. Organisation thus is seen as a result of emerging patterns of sense-making. Yet, stability is not seen as opposite *of* but requirement *for* change.

## Some Concluding Remarks

Organizations and organizational fields continue to experience transformations of various kinds—e.g. less hierarchy, shifting logics, more teaming, less co-located interaction, innovative practices and technologies, greater reliance on network structures and process organization—all of which create the need for renewed understanding of change and its consequences for organizations and organizational actors.

As we suggested at the beginning of this paper a new comprehensive understanding of change is needed to equip organisational actors sufficiently to respond to the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century organizations where planned and emergent change co-exists. Being able to live with emergent change is particularly important since this type of change offers both the flexibility and the agility needed to cope with unpredictable environmental developments related to increasing connectivity. Burns (2004, 2005) calls for choosing the right change

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<sup>2</sup> A 'rhizome' can be pictured as a conglomerate of endless webs of cables. The crossing of cables presents a node of interaction. Each web denotes the complex interaction pattern of a human being.



method for the circumstances. This usually requires a combination of planned and emergent change.

But as our paper has shown change is mainly about people and their interactions. As organisations are made up of individuals, change is inherently present all the time in them. Secondly, 'people shape the organisation and the organisation shapes the people' (Hosking and Morely, 1992). Organisations have moved from being seen as entities to a node in a rhizome interacting and mutually influencing other *organisations, people* and the *changing environment*. More precisely these *three* mutually adapt to and shape each other (Baum and Singh, 1994; Bandura, 2007).

However, people have difficulties with some properties of change, namely uncertainty and instability. Until the era of the '*brave new world*' (Beck, 2000) began, organisations in the bureaucratic era were simulacra of security, certainty and stability. Today organisations cannot fulfil this role anymore in the traditional sense. While it is not a new phenomenon, people struggle with the loss of security and the responsibility shifted on to them. The Enlightenment and Greek philosophers left the world with the idea that stability is the norm and that scientific research can discover the only truth with certainty. As a result emerges a mismatch between the prevailing paradigm of how the world works and everyday experiences of people. Therefore a shift in Weltanschauung is needed invoking a positive language for changing. This may be less dramatic than it seems. Stability does not have to be given up completely; merely it is a tension that amplifies change resulting in internal stability once an organisational becoming view on change within organisations prevails.

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