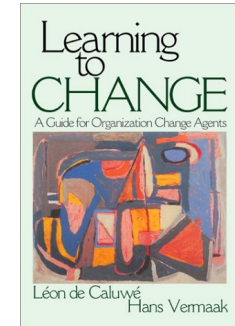# The colors of change

Introduction

hans vermaak

Dealing with multiple perspectives in the field of change management
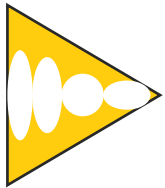
– Change endeavors differ widely. Luckily, so do approaches to change

– Efforts to integrate these approaches have failed again and again (e.g. Beer & Nohria). This failure gains meaning over time.

– Many labels, names, schools and traditions. But a similar variety keeps reappearing in both theory and practice.

– Maps of the terrain come into existence: in the Netherlands 'the colors of change' late 90's.

– That model was blessed with 20 years of developmental sprawl and is widely uses as 'common language'.

Five Ways of Thinking About Change

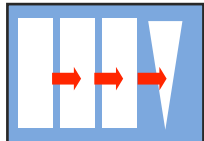|	Something Changes When You . . .
Yellow-print	Bring the interests of the **most important players** together by means of a process of negotiation enabling consensus or a win-win solution
Blue-print	Formulate clear goals and results, then design **rationally** a systematic approach and then implement the approach according to plan
Red-print	**Motivate** and stimulate people to perform best they can, contracting and rewarding desired behavior with the help of HRM-systems
Green-print	Create settings for **learning** by using OD interventions, allowing people to become more aware and more competent on their job
White-print	Understand what **underlying patterns** drive and block an organization's evolution, focusing interventions to create space for people's energy

Yellowprint Thinking

Assumptions

Something changes when you:
- Form coalitions between key people
- Search for common interests
- Negotiate a consensus

Conditions:
- Behind closed doors
- Sense of urgency

"Changing = a power game"

Route

Interventions:
- Alliance building, arbitration, mediation
- Changing top structures, policy formation, protégés

Diagnostic models:
- Competitive structure, force field analysis
- Policy windows, decision making funnel

Safeguarding outcomes:
- Result is unknown and changes along the way
- policy documents / power balance

Ideals

- Democratic society
- Win-win situations
- Feasible solutions

Dark side

Superficial yellow: back room deals, the strongest wins

Pitfalls: Building castles in the air, power struggles (loose-loose), unreliability

Allergies: ideologues, details, loss of face

Change agent

Role: facilitator who guards and uses his power base
- Sensitive to power relations and context
- Governing, conflict resolution, structuring
- Independence and self-control

Other actors: delegates, opinion leaders, constituencies

Focus: positions and context

Blueprint Thinking

Assumptions	Ideals
Something changes when you: - Think first and take planned action next - Do research to find objective solutions and clear goals - Design a step by step action plan - Implement it according to plan **Conditions:** - Monitor progress and take corrective measures - Foster stability and reduce complexity **"Change = a rational process"**	- Progress can be planned; a better world can be 'built ' - Order, efficiency, predictability - The 'best' solution (tangible aspects of organizations)

Route	Dark side
Interventions: - Strategic analysis (SWOT), Project management - ISO, BPR, ABC, BBS.. **Diagnostic models:** - Herring bone diagrams, portfolio analysis, benchmarks - Structures, organizational configurations **Safeguards:** - Clearly defined and guaranteed result - 'Measuring = knowing', monitoring systems	**Superficial blue**: mechanistic, ignoring irrational and external factors **Pitfall**: trying to control all, to steamroller over people and their feeling, being a 'hired gun' **Allergies**: vagueness, emotional situations, ambiguity, uncertainty

	Change agent
	Role: expert, project leader - Know how about the project content - Analyzing, structuring, presenting, planning - Performance, accuracy, independence, straight **Other actors:** principals, team members, target groups, interference **Focus:** expertise and results

Redprint Thinking

Assumptions

Something changes when you:
- Use the right incentives to motivate people
- Reward and punish people
- Make it interesting for people, create a team spirit
- Attention, support and recognition

Conditions:
- Exercise care and safeguard fairness
- Time and space to meet each other

"Change = a social phenomenon"

Route

Interventions:
- Personnel instruments, social gatherings
- Management by walking around, soap box

Diagnostic models:
- Motivational factors, sources of resistance
- Team roles, situational leadership

Safeguards:
- Outcome is outlined beforehand but not guaranteed
- HRM system, healthy relationships

Ideals

- Living in harmony, sense of community and care
- The optimal fit between organization and individuals
- A solution that motivates people

Dark side

Superficial red: fake interest, procedural rigor, smothering

Pitfalls: ignoring power, sparing the rod, conflict avoidance

Allergies: solo- or macho behavior, carelessness, problematizing

Change agent

Role: manager as coach, HRM or communication expert
- People person
- Motivating, seducing, communicating, collaborating
- Social, dependable, interested

Other actors: team builders, role models, colleagues

Focus: procedures and atmosphere

Greenprint thinking

Assumptions

Something changes when you:
- Create settings for collective learning
- Make people aware of their incompetence
- Experiment and explore with new abilities
- In an iterative process

Conditions:
- Sufficient safety, space and respect
- Sense of professionalism

"Changing = learning and development"

Route

Interventions:
- Feedback, coaching, training, MD, gaming
- Organization development, survey feedback
- Communities of practice

Diagnostic models:
- Johari window, learning curve, levels of learning
- Organizational iceberg, systems thinking

Safeguards:
- Outcome envisaged beforehand, but not guaranteed
- Permanently learning organization

Ideals

- Learning organizations: with everybody, about everything, always
- Growing and discovering
- Solutions that people find themselves

Dark side

Superficial green: individual learning away from work, lack of decisiveness

Pitfalls: schoolmarmish, ignoring that not everybody is willing or capable to learn

Allergies: political games, pigheadedness

Change agent

Role: facilitator who supports people
- Role model as reflective practitioner
- Didactic design, facilitation, feedback skills, coaching
- Empathy, creativity, curiosity

Other actors: champions, coaches, masters, participants

Focus: setting and communication

Whiteprint thinking

Assumptions

Something changes when you:
- Assist spontaneous evolution
- Discern underlying patterns, make meaning
- Create space for entrepreneurs, new heroes and rituals
- Remove obstacles and optimize conflicts

Conditions:
- Sense of humor and relevance
- Paradoxical interventions

"Changing = vitality/energy"

Route

Interventions:
- Self steering teams, search conferences
- Appreciative inquiry, open space meetings

Diagnostic models:
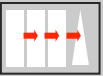- Organizational history, sacred cows, belief systems
- Chaos theory, megatrends

Safeguards:
- Hard to predict (the road = the destination)
- Self steering, dialogical quality

Ideals

- Wondrous universe full off multiple realities
- Self-steering in networks across organizations
- Sense making, activism, innovation

Dark side

Superficial white: 'everything is good', new age vibe

Pitfalls: insufficient insight into underlying dynamics, laissez faire, 'self-steering' as an excuse for management inaction

Allergies: boredom, mediocrity, rules, paternalism, group pressure

Change agent

Role: personality who understands the 'undercurrent'
- Embracing complexity, playing with possibilities
- Sense making, challenging the status quo, dialoguing
- Self aware, vulnerable, imaginative, headstrong

Other actors: positive deviants, boundary spanners, sponsors, networks

Focus: patterns and persons

The five colors at a glance

	Yellow-print	Blue-print	Red-print	Green-print	White-print
Something changes when you...	bring common interests together	think first and then act according to a plan	stimulate people in the right way	create settings for collective learning	create space for spontaneity
in a / an...	power game	rational process	trading exercise	learning process	dynamic evolutionary process
and create...	a feasible solution, a win-win situation	the best solution, a brave new world	a motivating solution, the best ´fit´	a solution that people develop themselves	a solution that releases energy
with interventions like ...	forming coalitions, changing top structures	project management strategic analysis	assessments & rewards, social gatherings	gaming and coaching, open systems planning	open space meetings self-steering teams
by a / an ...	facilitator who uses his own power base	expert in the field, project manager	HRM expert, a manager who coaches	facilitator who supports people	person who uses his being as instrument
aimed at ...	positions and context	knowledge and results	procedures, inspiration and atmosphere	setting and communication	patterns and meanings
The result is ...	unknown and shifting	defined and guaranteed	outlined but not guaranteed	envisaged but not guaranteed	Unpredictable but not aimless
safeguarded by ...	decision documents and power balances	benchmarking and ISO systems	HRM systems and healthy relationships	a learning organization	self-management and dialogical quality
The pitfalls lie in...	dreaming and lose-lose	ignoring external and irrational aspects	smothering and conflict avoidance	excluding noone and lack of action	superficial understanding and laissez faire

Four Practical Uses

- **Strategy: situational choice of the 'best' approach fitting the issue, the organization ...**

- **Change agent:** awareness of one's own preferred style, assumptions, limitations ...

- **Diagnosis:** multiple viewpoints in understanding people, problems, organizations...

- **Communication:** common language amongst people involved reduces haggling over 'change only happens if you ...'

Four applications: typical puzzles

Diagnosis	Strategy
– How do you delineate what you diagnose? How to define a change effort?	– Can you do a 'bit of everything' in an integral change plan?
– Can you do a multi-colored analysis by yourself? How can you uncover what is hidden?	– What criteria determines appropriate color of change strategy?
– Do you understand an organization best by looking at it from its 'own color'?	– How do you achieve sufficient depth of a chosen change approach? Are all the colors as powerful?
– How many colors does an organization need? Do all organizations need to become learning organizations?	– Are there situations when you need to combine colors? How do you prevent interference?
Change agent	**Communication**
– How do you define the change agents? Where are they to be found in an organization?	– When the colors fight, which colors typically win? What are reasons behind this?
– How do you assess you own colors? Should one learn to master all colors? Can one have a 'neutral' stance?	– How to legitimize a new color when it is at odds with prevailing 'colors'? How do you get it to succeed?
– Do people change color during their careers? Should one learn to believe in the color one is good at?	– Doesn't it stigmatize, this thinking in colors? Is reality not more complicated than this?
– What does one need to be 'professional' in mixed colored environments?	– Is there a deeper meaning behind the 'colors'? Are they specific to certain cultures?

Reading more from the author

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- A. Stoppelenburg & H. Vermaak. 'Defixation' as an intervention perspective. Journal of Management Inquiry, 2009
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- D. Zandee & H. Vermaak. Designing appreciative inquiry as generative change process. Paper International Conference on Organizational Discourse, 2012
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