

## **Submission to the Review of Tasmania's State Service**

*(This submission is from Graham Gourlay, Director, Run-to-Work Pty Ltd) and Gil Sawford, Organisational Consultant at WLF Accounting & Advisory)*

### *Why we are providing this submission*

The Review of Tasmania's State Service (TSS) has been established to ensure that the TSS is fit-for-purpose both today and into the future and that it will continue to provide the Government, and Tasmanians, with the highest possible level of services, support and advice that is essential for all Tasmanians' wellbeing.

Tasmanians have the right to expect a TSS that is efficient and effective and that delivers for them. Tasmanian governments have a similar right. The TSS will have to change if it is to meet these challenges.

As a contribution to these challenges, we are providing this submission because we have considerable post-graduate qualifications; hands-on leadership, management and consultancy expertise and a research-proven methodology all relevant to the intent of the TSS Review. We are also third-and sixth-generation Tasmanians with considerable (life-time) experience of, on one hand, the culture and challenges facing the TSS and, on the other hand, of driving high performance, reform and renewal in the Commonwealth, Tasmanian and Victorian public sectors. We also feel a sense of obligation to share our expertise, experience, learnings and successful approach with the Review in the hope it may benefit our own (Tasmanian) community.

Our tested, proven approach enables organisations to create, embed, sustain and continuously improve a high level of performance and the culture they desire – whatever that might be. (It might be a culture of innovation, of being human- or client-centred, of safety, of empowerment, high well-being, values-based, continuous improvement, collaboration, collegiality, free of bullying or negative acts, etc.) It also provides the platform for effective change management, as everyone involved and impacted by the change feels like they created and own the change, are consequently committed to the change, embedding it, to making it work well and to its continuous improvement.

### *Our approach or paradigm*

Our approach brings out the best in people because it builds their sense of ownership of the envisioned workplace practice (the culture) and empowers them to regularly reflect on and be responsible for the achievement, self-regulation and implementation of the vision. Consequently, they feel important, valued, trusted and – as a result of having regular opportunities in a conducive climate to do so – also welcome to speak up and be heard.

Their sense of ownership is established through working in small groups (teams, workgroups) to identify, describe and share the best experiences (positive psychology dynamics are at work here) that the participants have had and the ensuing discussion enables the group to articulate and agree on how they wish their workplace to be.

Regular opportunities for groups to reflect\* on how they are going in experiencing their agreed vision for their workplace enable the group to, from time to time, agree on changes that might be required (to achieve the vision) and provide opportunity for participants to model, observe, practice and improve their emotional and social intelligence skills. People grow\*\* from feeling trusted as a result of being given responsibility for shaping their own workplace environment. (\*Reflective practice involves speaking one's truth and listening in a respectful way in a safe, collaborative setting. \*\*Some academic literature refers to the result of this process as '*building bigger minds*' - we see this all the time when delivering our methodology. What is actually happening, in scientific terms, is that participants are enhancing their social and emotional intelligence.)

The same group processes can (we would say, *should*) be used to design, build, implement and continuously improve change projects of any scale. A paper – the *Practitioners' Guide to Managing Change* - setting out in detail this approach to managing change accompanies this submission. (We are also providing the executive overview of the results of our PhD project, on which we collaborated, that scientifically tested and demonstrated the effectiveness of our approach.)

*Our best practice approach delivers on many elements of the TSS Review's Key Focus Areas*

Our approach is recommended best practice for achieving:

- Public service change
- Promoting collaboration and partnerships
- Cultural change – specifically, promoting risk-based decision-making, increasing diversity, promoting innovation, improving accountability, enhancing performance)
- Identifying opportunities to improve (all aspects of) government services, etc.
- Achieving greater economies and efficiencies in administration
- Identifying opportunities to streamline bureaucracy and services
- Examining and improving the effectiveness and efficiency of government services
- Making decentralized services effective
- Developing the long-term capability and agility of the TSS
- Attracting, developing and retaining a skilled public sector (*Comment: We have seen how workgroups and organisations that embrace our methodology buzz and bond with the pride and collegiality that comes from them being recognized as high performing, highly effective and successful. Humans love to be part of a success story. They don't want to leave and newcomers want to join. They strive to stay ahead of the pack.*)
- Enhanced workforce management processes – our approach particularly supports the recognition and development of employee performance and through our self-regulating and buy-in process, substantially makes the group self-managing.

### *Closing*

We would like the TSS Review to recommend that a diverse set of agencies and/or workgroups across the TSS and the State conduct pilot projects lasting 6–12 months each to acquaint themselves with the methodology and measure the results. We would be happy to support them in undertaking the process and the evaluation. The pilot will equip key staff in each agency to support the further roll-out of the approach across the agency.

Finally, Graham would be happy to share with the Review insights he gained from working in the Commonwealth and the Victorian bureaucracies to drive reform (fix corruption, ‘hardening of the arteries’, failures, other systemic shortcomings) and organizational rejuvenation.

- As a secondee from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Graham was Assistant Secretary of the second Hope Royal Commission into the Intelligence and Security agencies that assessed the effectiveness of the reforms that flowed from the first Hope Royal Commission.
- He, subsequently, was -
  - Executive General Manager of the (first Australian) DPP’s Office (established in Victoria to overcome endemic shortcomings in the criminal prosecution function in the Victorian Justice system);
  - responsible for removing entrenched corruption from a State Liquor Licensing Commission;
  - responsible for designing the wholesale refresh of the top structure of Department of Labor and National Service/Department of Employment and Industrial Relations and
  - he advised the incoming government on the rejuvenation (organizational renewal & cultural refresh) of the ATO. (Note: His advice was followed to the letter and proved effective.)
  - Graham has also been closely involved with reforms in the emergency services sector, in executive government/whole-of-government decision-making and coordination and in driving/leading efficiency initiatives (in Victoria) and at UTAS, particularly at the business school.
- He has taken an interest in tell-tale signs of toxic culture in the TSS, particularly apparent from the reluctance to innovate and work on the culture and from the high (and premature) separation rate of outstanding non-Tasmanians from their appointments to high office in Tasmania. He would be pleased to brief you more fully on these perspectives.

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### **Attachments** *(emailed separately)*

The Attachments set out our empowered, group process-based, best practice, approach to organizational high performance; organizational renewal/rejuvenation/refresh; continuous improvement and change management and to building, shaping and sustaining desired workplace culture and practice:

**Attachment A:** *Practitioners’ Guide to Managing Change*

**Attachment B:** *PhD Research Project – Debrief/Executive Summary*

**Attachment C:** *Building and Shaping Desired Workplace Practice*

**Attachment D:** *Reflective Conversation*

17 April 2020

# **Organisation & culture change: *How do we do that?***

## **A Practitioner's Guide**

*To undertaking effective organisation & culture change by attending to human realities, deep engagement, behaviour change and group dynamics to get stakeholder participation, ownership, capability development and successful, sustainable business outcomes.*

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April 2020

## **Organisational & culture change: *How do we do that?* A Practitioner's Guide**

*To undertaking effective organisation & culture change by attending to human realities, deep engagement, behaviour change & group dynamics to get stakeholder participation, ownership, capability development and successful, sustainable business outcomes.*

*'...engagement in change must be inclusive of ... the broadest possible cross-section of those who may influence, who may be affected by, or who may be called upon to evaluate the change.'*<sup>1</sup>

- **It is about participation & ownership**

*'... almost everything important happens in a small group. ... peer-to-peer interaction in where most learning takes place; it is the fertile earth out of which something new is produced.'*<sup>2</sup>

*'... ensure discussions about workplace culture are an intrinsic part of all team meetings'*

*'... once a forum is established within an organisation to air peoples' ideas and feelings – where people are able to talk about how their work is really affecting them – some terrific things can emerge and people begin to work so much more effectively.'*<sup>3</sup>

- **It is about regular open dialogue in small groups, where career and personal safety is assured**

*'... new transformational strategies do not make a difference until people think and act differently.'*<sup>4</sup>

- **It is about changing behaviour**

*'... as a (result) of their deep involvement in change planning and implementation, (employees) develop skills relevant to the particular change and generic but important skills they can bring to bear on future challenges. (Capability-building of stakeholders through meaningful participation in change is the greatest, most valuable single outcome of change.)'*<sup>5</sup>

- **It is about capability building**

*'The confronting challenge for leaders and executives responsible for change is to stop directing and protecting long enough to support and enable others to do the job.'*<sup>6</sup>

- **It is about leaders & managers learning to let go, trust, enable & support others**

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<sup>1</sup> Grubb (2002)

<sup>2</sup> Block P. 'COMMUNITY The Structure of Belonging'

<sup>3</sup> Professor Susan Long, Professor of Management & Organisational Dynamics, Swinburne University quoted in The Age, April 2001 'Working Smart instead of scared'

<sup>4</sup> Black & Gregersen

<sup>5</sup> Hays, JM [From correspondence .....]

<sup>6</sup> Ibid

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## 1. Synopsis

The key to organisational change<sup>7</sup>, rejuvenation and culture<sup>8</sup> change<sup>9</sup> is to change the behaviours of staff and workgroups. *“Organisational transformation is fundamentally not about transforming the organisation; it is about transforming the people who work in it.”*

The challenge is how can we change human behaviour in organisations to produce improvement in the organisation's effectiveness and performance.

We have found that a motivated team of 10 or so people can *'change the way we do things around here'* (i.e. the culture), provided they are open to question their beliefs, change some comfortable habits and mutually support each other to practice the new changed behaviours required.

If culture or organisational change needs to happen across large numbers of people, we advocate enabling them to collaborate in small teams or groups and apply the techniques and peer support described below.

## 2. Executive summary

The key to effective organisational change is to adopt an approach – essentially, a small group process – that ensures staff members are actively and meaningfully involved throughout the change process.

This ensures that the staff who are involved in and impacted by the change will feel like they own the change and - having invested their emotional selves in it - they will generally take pride in it and do their best to ensure it is a success. They will also be minded to not only make it work well, but also to continuously improve and sustain the change. They will help each other to embed new behaviours in the workplace and genuinely care about supporting each other and making the change a success.

There is growing appreciation that all organisation change – operational, technological, procedural, cultural – needs to be effected (designed, introduced, embedded, sustained) by engaging staff in the change through participation in small group processes – team meetings, small-scale workshops, etc. It is in safe, small group environments that people can have all the conversations they need to have. *'If we want a change in culture, the work is to change the conversation – or more precisely to have a conversation we have not had before, one that has the power to create something new ... .'* (Block)

This paper is a distillation of international thought leadership in this field of using conversation in safe small groups to effect organisational and culture change.

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<sup>7</sup> Defined as 'The deliberate, methodical, and comprehensive approach to implementing a specific business or technology change; or, more generally, to improve performance or conditions in a given business area.' Hays JM, *White Space and the Zen of Organisation Change Management*

<sup>8</sup> Culture 'can be thought of as the glue that holds an organisation – all its activities, functions, processes and roles – together.' (ibid) Woolley, S. in PWC's *'Insights into Transformation'*, June 2008 provide this definition: *“Culture emerges as an outcome of the many things we do as individuals and as teams on a daily basis, within organisations, to deliver work and respond to change in the environment.”*

<sup>9</sup> We use these terms interchangeably because the activities referred to suffer from the same problems and benefit from the same solutions.

In many organisations, small group processes are not well done; people often do not feel safe to speak up and share their views and feelings. (So it is not surprising that most major change and transformation efforts are fraught and ultimately fail.) Skilling in how to create and utilise spaces where people can do the work required – personally and as a group - may be required. This paper addresses this capability gap or challenge and pre-conditions for small groups to effectively work on changing culture.

The paper also explores the how's and why's of small group processes so that the fundamentals of what happens when people interact in small groups can be understood and applied effectively to deliver organisational change and culture change.

In essence, the approach we advocate;

- engages<sup>10</sup> everyone in small teams
- builds a sense of ownership of the agreed changes in team members' behaviour
- enables them to hold each other accountable for their actions in making the changes effective, an operational reality
- encourages them to be open to and to actually change their ways of thinking and
- encourages new behaviours in support of getting the agreed new culture.

### 3. Preface

This Practitioner's Guide to organisational and culture change takes a significantly different approach to change from the approaches that most executives, managers and other professionals who are looked to, to drive and deliver change initiatives, are trained, experienced and equipped to provide. It is only natural and understandable therefore that most people with key responsibilities for delivering change can be expected to resist, initially or completely, the thinking and approaches presented here. Those with responsibility for a change project who are open to stretch and grow their awareness and skills\* and then lead others in delivering human-centred change, deserve to be comprehensively supported and given explanations for the key elements of our approach. (\*The capacity to facilitate group dynamics, appreciate the importance of and create sustainable safe work environments, for example, are not often part of the skillset of the software engineers and HR staff who tend to be tasked with delivering organisational change projects.)

For this reason, the Guide ranges widely, comprehensively and somewhat repetitively perhaps (some may find), between the high level perspectives on where elements of this human-centred approach to change come from; why they are essential and effective – that is, why the approach works; why the traditional approaches do generally fail - on the one hand, and the fine detail of how to implement the practical processes involved, on the other.

This human-centred approach has its roots in professions and fields of learning (psycho-dynamics, emotional intelligence, group processes, high performing teams, organisational

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<sup>10</sup> At Attachment C, we draw on the work of Dr Jay Hays and his collaborators to explain how these states – human orientations, emotion, attitude or state of mind - are created and achieved through Dialogue.



change, organisational development and rejuvenation, etc) which makes it radically different in many respects from what many change project managers are mentally aware of and comfortable with, capability- and experience-wise. Consequently, I feel compelled to share with those with responsibility for delivering change pretty much everything I know and believe in about organisational and culture change, where-ever it is germane to the understandings, solutions, approaches or processes that we are canvassing and advocating.

I feel the obligation and compassion towards those involved in change to give them all the help, insight and know-how I can, so it is a longer document than I'd prefer. I hope change managers will find the materials here helpful and I wish them well in their endeavours to deliver successful change projects.

#### **4. Introduction – Why we need a Practitioner's Guide to organisation and culture change: The problem about change and where the solution lies**

The way we behave in organisations, effectively the organisation's culture, emerge as an outcome of the many things we do both as individuals and as team members on a daily basis within our organisations, to deliver work and respond to change in the environment.<sup>11</sup>

Organisational change and culture change are about changing human behaviour in the workplace. They involve changing what we individually and collectively believe and do in our daily (working) lives; how we stimulate or hamper each other in our contributing to our shared goals.

The work of changing ways of being, of behaving and of doing needs to be carried out both at the level of the individual as well as at the level of the group because behaviour comes from and is experienced by both individuals and by groups. Effecting organisational and culture change requires us to work on both fronts.

Work at the level of the individual is key because it is only when at least one person in the group models the new, desired behaviour required by the new culture, that co-workers will start to copy this behaviour and bring about the 'snow-ball effect' or rippling-out across the group of that new behaviour. Moreover, it is only when a number of individuals practice the desired new behaviour that the behaviour becomes embedded as the new culture – the new way we work around here.

Work at the group level is equally critical because of the following principles, insights and facts that change practitioners are widely agreed on:

- If you are aiming for true change, work with small groups of 10 or so.
- Every team (workgroup or organisation) has to do the work of finding its own particular key to change. Or to put it another way, every group's solution and steps towards embedding change needs to be customised by its members.
- Small groups are effective at driving, delivering and sustaining change because members can see each other, give each other attention, care, support, build and nurture trust between members of the group. This is not achievable in larger groups.

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<sup>11</sup> PWC 'Insights into Transformation' June 2008

- All members of the group need to be participants in the change so that they become stakeholders and owners. All of their combined perspectives, intelligence and creativity is essential to bring the preferred changes to life.

The interplay between these two levels that results in effective culture change is described by Bremer<sup>12</sup> – “... it is an exciting and interesting combination of personal beliefs and behaviours and collective beliefs and behaviours (that) emerge in daily interactions where people copy, coach and correct each other.”

### **The problem: Most change projects fail**

Hays writes<sup>13</sup> that;

- most prescriptions for change are 'recipes for failure'
- it is time (necessary) to change the way we change
- human systems are paradoxical and counter-intuitive
- if social and organisational change were predictable and change management could be effectively executed by following the available formulae, few changes would fail
- but 50% - 70% or 80% of change projects fail
- we therefore need a new way of approaching change.

The causes of this level of failure of organisation change initiatives include:

- the engineering and scientific mindset that shapes the design and implementation of change in many if not most organisations – in other words, **THE HUMAN ELEMENT IS DISREGARDED**
- The general approach and conventional wisdom of those responsible for change projects have this mechanistic mindset and consequently overlook the most important aspect of any project: **PEOPLE MATTER!**
- organisations are essentially human enterprises, with all the foibles, irrationality, subjectivity, and capriciousness that characterises humanity
- human passion, capacity for learning and their potential are too often not valued and overlooked
- projects are designed, managed and implemented as if organisations and the people who work in them are machines
- while we would like to believe that the installation of new technology or adoption of a new business process is a straightforward affair, the lessons from countless implementations reveal the fallibility of plans. It is not so much that the solution per se is the problem, rather it is inattention to the change process that lies at the heart of failure of organisational change projects. **HOW THE SOLUTION IS DERIVED & IMPLEMENTED IS AS IMPORTANT TO ITS SUCCESS AS ITS INTRINSIC MERITS.**
- change weariness in employees is avoidable, unnecessary. It is more often than not the result of dehumanising treatment during change and failure to involve and engage employees meaningfully in the change. It is not the change itself that is the problem; it is **HOW** it is undertaken.

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<sup>12</sup> Bremer, M

<sup>13</sup> Provided in unpublished correspondence but Dr Hays has authorised use of these materials here.

***The solution – at a high strategic or conceptual level***

- If people spent more time thinking about and working with PEOPLE involved in a change and the PROCESS (what is going on?; how will we work together on this?) and less on the mechanics of change, success rates would improve and so would the experiences and lives of people in organisations.
- We need to recognise that often the most difficult part of the change is irrational; that is the people side of change seldom responds predictably or desirably. So we need to create spaces and give time where people can have conversations, talk about their feelings (emotions) understand where people are at what their needs are in terms of their commitment, motivation; learn and grow from one another collectively; build goodwill and trust.
- We need to tackle change in a way so that all stakeholders emerge in robust condition – not tired and exhausted – feeling resilient, capable, ready to make the most of the change and ready to make improvements and tackle the next change. Feeling stretched, practiced and valued in dealing with challenges associated with change; better skilled and equipped to tackle future challenges. They need to emerge feeling healthy, competent and optimistic
- The building of capability through deep, meaningful participation in change is potentially the greatest single outcome of change.

Hays' Principles for guiding organisational change are:

- Make the targets of the change the instruments of change
- The process is the solution
- Every change is an opportunity to learn and develop; design your change accordingly.

***In summary,***

- The main difference between conventional approaches to change and those put forward here is the degree to which employees are involved in understanding the need for and intent of change, in architecting, implementing and evaluating change.
- When employees are fundamentally engaged with change, they embody it.
- They understand and are committed to it.
- Change must not be something done to employees, rather something they can and should do themselves.

## 5. Understanding the bedrock where this solution (thinking, approach) lies: Grounded in the nature of humans & small group processes. Where we are coming from.

Stephen R. Covey puts it like this: *"Unless the needed change is embedded in individuals, it cannot show up in the larger organisation in a way that consistently affects behaviour and results. ... until the needed changes get deeply embedded in the values, mindset, and skill set of individuals, organisation change simply will not happen ...*

*... until individuals deeply see and feel the need for change, make the necessary moves, and fight to the finish in making good things happen, the change will not work its way into the culture (the shared value systems of individuals), and until that happens you simply don't see sustained change with powerful positive impacts.*

*... until the heart and mind of an individual change, not much else will happen."*<sup>14</sup>

Margaret Mead said *"Never doubt that a small group of committed people can change the world; indeed, it is the only thing that ever has."*<sup>15</sup>

In his book, 'COMMUNITY - the Structure of Belonging'<sup>16</sup>, Peter Block states:

*'The key to gathering . . . stakeholders is to create in the room a living example of how I want the future to be. Then there is nothing to wait for, because the future begins to show up as we gather. All voices need to be heard ... What makes this succeed is that almost everything important happens in a small group. ... peer-to-peer interaction in where most learning takes place; it is the fertile earth out of which something new is produced.'*

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<sup>14</sup> Quote in Covey's Foreword to Black, J. Stewart & Gregersen, Hal B. *It Starts with One. Changing Individuals Changes Organisations* (INSEAD)

<sup>15</sup> *ibid*

<sup>16</sup> Block. P

## 6. Key challenges of organisation and culture change

### i. **Challenges at the level of the individual**

As Covey's above quotation attests "... until the heart and mind of an individual change, not much else will happen", Herrero notes that individuals need to change before the organisation will change.

Many of us will need to change the way we think – our beliefs, 'rules', expectations<sup>17</sup> - so that we can develop and practice the agreed new behaviours required by the changes and the new culture. Only then will the required new behaviours be modelled, practiced, seen and become distributed, embedded, automatic, routinized and be sustained.

Black and Gregersen put it this way:

*"Lasting success (in achieving organisational change) lies in changing individuals first; then the organisation follows. This is because an organisation changes only as far or as fast as its collective individuals change. Without individual change, there is no organisational change. ... to change your organisation, you must first change individuals, and sometimes (maybe even often) this means changing yourself as well."*

Phillips and Smallridge<sup>18</sup>, after many years designing and delivering leadership and culture change programs, recognised the link between personal transformation and organisation culture change. They gained the insight that the process of developing an ever-increasing level of self-awareness, learning to be real, actively engaging with those you work with and focussing on empowering people is the basis for bringing about change at an individual, organisational and industry (sector) level.

Their key learnings include seeing the importance of;

- adopting an action research cycle of action, reflection and refinement to drive continuous learning and improvement
- embracing lifelong learning to underpin personal development and culture change
- building effective teams to enable learning, achievement and a positive experience.

Many of us may also need to acquire some new skills or enhance our competence in some or several areas. For example, some may need to strengthen our self-awareness, empathy, or assertiveness skills; our capacity for compassion and/or courage in speaking up so that we can provide negative feedback and concerns to colleagues at all levels in a collaborative, non-aggressive, non-attacking way.

Some of us may need to do both; to acquire and enhance skills. Behaviours are often shaped by beliefs, for example. In which case we will then need to work on some aspect of our belief system if we are to adopt and practice a new behaviour.

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<sup>17</sup> Beliefs, 'rules', expectations can sometimes lock us into certain behaviours. For example, a person who believes it is their duty to not forgive but rather to punish someone who is perceived to have 'wronged' them, may well be unable to find their compassion for that person, to forgive them and let it (the 'wrong') go; as a result it is likely they will be unable to adopt more collaborative behaviours towards everyone in the group, to avoid themselves poisoning themselves with the toxins of hostility towards others and move forwards in their career and life.

<sup>18</sup> Phillips C. & Smallridge M., Unpublished paper 'Culture Changer through Personal Transformation'

It is clear from these basic requirements of individuals who are going to be part of culture change – but worth highlighting because some may resent and resist the implications for themselves - that we, as individuals, will need to be prepared and willing to change and grow in our beliefs, skills and behaviours if we are to be capable of executing the changes – the required new behaviours..

For example: One of the most commonly required skills that individuals need to acquire or enhance to have a fully satisfactory and fulfilling organisational life is the skill of finding their courage – their 'voice' – to speak up with colleagues about things that concern them or are impacting the group and its performance in such a way that their speaking their truth will not be experienced by any individual or the group at large as attacking. This skill can require changes in beliefs<sup>19</sup> and behaviours, new insights and skills.

Work may also need to be done by other individuals and the group to enable colleagues to share their concerns and contributions to the work of the group. People may need to learn to practice empathy, compassion, listening while withholding judgement, tolerance, self-discipline.

This is probably the area of individual and group work (skilling, practice; change) that is most often instrumental in achieving culture change associated with high group performance on any front, such as the creation of a culture of collaboration, innovation, client-service, etc.

The skills that may need to be developed include -

- Creating a safe, empowered workplace culture
- Identifying 'high risk' areas (where uncivil behaviours will potentially - most likely - be experienced) that require priority attention
- Sensing when someone's behaviour troubles you
- Self-confidence and courage to speak with the person whose behaviour makes you feel uncomfortable &/or to share your discomfort with the workgroup in the presence of the source of your discomfort
- Capacity to have a conversation with someone whose behaviour troubles you without making them feel attacked and so that the relationship gets warmer, not colder
- Straight conversation and its role in avoiding experiencing bullying and creating a high performing team
- Empathy
- Compassion for self and others
- Mindfulness
- Vulnerability (capacity to ask for help)
- Humility
- Dialogue - Narrative mediation
- Re-building strained relationships
- Restorative practices – restorative conversations
- Potential power, role of a bystander or colleague
- The dilemma of whether to speak up or stay silent
- Finding courage
- Practicing assertiveness while warming the relationship

A caution: People do not change easily or quickly. Some may find it impossible in their present frame of mind.

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<sup>19</sup> As Bremer states identifying and altering beliefs can be done in separate one-on-one sessions with a coach or in small workshops with a group of close colleagues who are comfortable enough to open up.

## **ii. Challenges at the level of the group**

People aren't going to suddenly, as if by magic, start behaving differently just as a result of a new directive from above, a new organisational strategy, corporate values statement, structure, new technology or system! Most people will need to witness and have the experience of other people modelling and being recognised and rewarded for practicing the new behaviour. And as we shall see in some depth shortly, they need to have opportunities to try out; to get welcome, compassionately-expressed feedback from trusted colleagues on their try-out and to fine-tune, repeatedly practice and embed the new behaviour.

To achieve organisational culture change people must interact together in small groups where a climate of trust and sense of safety to say what needs to be said is known to exist by the members. (How such a culture is created and sustained and how members can frame such conversations are described below and in several Attachments.)

In the group, a number of things need to happen. The dynamics that need to occur include:

- The leaders, 'the champions of change', change agents, the 'positive energisers', the 'naturals' and the 'early adopters' model the desired new behaviour, including how to support their colleagues to think, act and be experienced in new ways. *'One positive new behaviour can turn into a powerful habit that changes the system.'*
- Individuals and the group itself practice the application of new skills, beliefs and behaviours; they get feedback on them and opportunities to fine-tune their application.
- Learning and leveraging – ie. 'snowballing' or creating ripples of the new behaviours constantly – trigger and build the momentum for change across the group and the system, for doing things differently. *'One butterfly can create a storm.'*

## **iii. Challenges for the leadership**

The first challenge is to ensure that the workforce is empowered to make the changes a routine operational reality. If change is simply driven as a top down initiative, the changes never reach the bottom of the power pyramid (the hierarchy) – ie. the workforce – where operations and the bulk of interpersonal relationships happen and where clients are served.

Another challenge for leaders is to be aware that certain professional paradigms that give pre-eminence to control - to controlling people's behaviours and using more control to solve all problems - can often be found in areas responsible for driving culture change. These professionals and their paradigm will usually be opposed – philosophically and actively (culturally!) - to bottom up approaches.

This a fundamental error in today's world. Stephen Covey puts it like this: *'...trying to impose change from the organisation onto the individual doesn't work in a more global and sophisticated world. You have to work from the inside out. ... It is not only possible but vastly more rewarding to help individuals see the need for a change, empower them to make the necessary moves, and encourage and support them through to the finish.'*<sup>20</sup>

If the leaders do not appreciate that culture change must be both a top down as well as a bottom up process, the change effort will surely fail.

## **iv. Challenges of aligning structure, roles and culture through the change**

<sup>20</sup> Covey, S., in Foreword to Black, J. & Gregersen *It Starts with One INSEAD*

Isabel Menzies Lyth warns<sup>21</sup> of the need to modify roles and structure to allow changes in the culture and behaviours to be deployed.

*"A nurse cannot be more sensitive and intimately related to her patients (patient-centered in today's language) when the nursing system is based on multiple indiscriminate caretaking that prevents her from ever really getting to know them well."*

Military and church culture, for example, that often feature a blind acceptance of authority and hierarchy will likely find it difficult to embrace genuine bottom up processes and empowered workforce.

**v. The need for a specialist enterprise change capability**

Over the last decade, the discipline of change management has emerged and evolved. Whereas once an ad hoc approach to a change initiative would have consisted of perhaps a communication plan and training plan and would have sufficed, but now a specialist professional discipline is required, driven by the rapidly development knowledge and awareness about what motivates and engages humans, how their brains and emotions work, about organisational structure and effective, bottom-up as well as top-down leadership. Leading organizations are now beginning to make the shift from applying change management in a project-by-project fashion towards institutionalizing and embedding change management and to build a true organizational capability in change. What lies behind this is the reality that *'Most of our change projects are based on incorrect or deeply inadequate conceptual frameworks. We simply do not understand how organizations work and therefore, how to change them intentionally.'*<sup>22</sup>

So we need to have in our organisations professional staff who are trained and experienced in advising on, designing, implementing and maintaining the capability of organisation and culture change. I suggest the key test of whether an organisation has the necessary specialist know-how in organisational and culture change is whether it has a credible, externally respected capacity to know whether the way the organisation is tackling change is best practice and reliably successful.

These will be people who see change as a constant, living thing...not a project. They will appreciate that organizations are political arenas where power-plays and human emotions make the outcome of any change quite unpredictable. This factor is more determinative than all others of success or failure in organisation change, experienced change specialists believe. So this is one element of the necessary 'conceptual framework' we mentioned above.

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<sup>21</sup> Menzies Lyth, I., 'Organisations on the Couch: Changing Organisations and Individuals' pp371

<sup>22</sup> Prosci - in their email of 13 August 2013



## 7. Understanding – and the challenge of changing - human behaviour

It is *de rigeur* in many fields of human and organisational development (e.g. coaching, counselling) these days to base our understandings, thinking, theories and initiatives on the rapidly developing field of brain science – neuroscience. (The push-back against this has already started. I notice commentators are now referring to “neuro-mania”!)

One pillar we need to put in place to underpin the thinking in this paper is to explain why humans need to engage in meaningful relationship activity (group dynamics) for them to be able to change their behaviour effectively.

They need to repeat a new behaviour a number of times. The embedding – making a habit – of the new behaviour is helped by the person getting both positive and negative feedback on the efficacy of their attempts to practice the new behaviour and also helped by repetition or practicing the new behaviour.

Black and Gregerson suggest that humans are biologically hardwired to resist change. Herrero disputes this (*'There is nothing in our biology that makes us resist change! But we can act in defence of things that can disturb our level of control over things.'*<sup>23</sup>) I suggest people resist change out of their discomfort or fear that the change might undermine or threaten their sense of competence, comfort with the status quo, self-esteem or reputation.

So perhaps it is more accurate to say that humans are wired to resist random change. We are wired to survive, so we hang onto what has worked for us in the past. We hang onto successful past mental models or maps and use them to guide current and future behaviour.

We instinctively prefer and choose to practice routines (habits, behaviours) that we have become competent at. When faced with doing a new thing, having to adopt a new, different behaviour we fear – and/or resist and avoid feeling or - being shown up as incompetent

Modern times and pressures have conspired to work against this ancient biological coding of hanging onto what works, onto what we are well-practiced and competent in.

Change efforts – inevitably requiring behavioural change of some kind – run into a ‘brain barrier’ comprising pre-existing and successful mental maps. These incredibly powerful mental maps determine how people see the world of work, guiding their daily steps and behaviours.

To get past such strong disincentives and barriers people need to feel safe in trialling a new behaviour and to know that their peers will support them in trialling, fine-tuning, practicing (til they are doing it well) and adopting the new behaviour. They need feedback, encouragement and support to come to believe in a path that will take them from doing the right thing - the new behaviour - poorly, to doing it well. *“Even if people see the new right (behaviour), they must also see a way to travel from doing the right (behaviour) poorly, to doing it well.”*<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Herrero, p.368

<sup>24</sup> Black & Gregersen

This is where I believe, the role of the safe team environment comes in. The practice and adoption of new behaviours “*needs consistent care and nurturing.*” When we try out and practice a new behaviour, we are at our most vulnerable. We fear making a mess of it; being laughed at, scorned, humiliated and possibly even shame. We are therefore in serious need of a sense of safety, trust and confidence that our colleagues will be kindly and support us in our attempts to become competent in the new behaviour. That they will appreciate our courage in trying something new.

Black & Gregersen suggest that ‘change champions’ can also provide this role; can support the trialling, refining and embedding of new behaviours – i.e. effectively reinforce the desired new behaviours.

Herrero<sup>25</sup>, an experienced psychiatrist as well as organisation change consultant, provides valuable insights and understandings about behaviour and behaviour change.

i. *Translate the elements of the culture you want into practical behaviours*

As we have seen, behaviours are the bedrock for organisational culture change. “*If you want to change culture, change behaviours.*”

Herrero suggests that it is necessary to describe the desired culture in terms of ‘behaviours’, not ‘qualities’. ‘Qualities’ are broad-brush labels or concepts such as ‘mindset’, ‘attitude’, ‘a culture of innovation’, ‘an empowered culture’, ‘values based’, ‘living the values’, ‘people- or human-centred’, ‘entrepreneurial spirit’, ‘customer centric’, ‘high performing’, ‘team oriented’ or ‘team player’, etc, that are *non-operational*. He describes such ‘qualities’ as “close-to-useless”.

His point is that such ‘qualities’ need to be translated into ‘behaviours’ in order to operationalize them, to make them visible and to bring them to life.

People need to know exactly, in concrete, visible terms what behaviours are required or expected and what are not; to know what to do and what not to do. Only then, when desired behaviours are clearly spelt out, at the level of actually doing practical, visible, simple things, will people be able to have a shared meaning about the culture they want and be able to know what behaviours to expect, recognise, correct, endorse, reinforce, measure, evaluate, refine, review and reward. Only when behaviours are articulated at this atomic level can they be managed.

Much change can be achieved by concentrating on one or just a few underlying behaviours. Often one or a few new bedrock, ‘non-negotiable’ behaviours can drive changes in the ‘superstructure’ or a lot of other behaviours and practices.

ii. *People behave as they do because that behaviour has been rewarded, thus reinforced and is sustained.*

Herrero suggests that if you want to change someone’s behaviour you can either find what is rewarding and reinforcing it and address (stop) that dynamic or you can find ways to reward

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<sup>25</sup> Herrero, L.

alternative behaviours. (I see this as an interventionist, medical model that is perhaps a touch manipulative to my mind and for my liking.)

The behavioural coaching profession would prefer a non-interventionist approach and probably suggest that a person can be helped to see their behaviour that is causing them or another person or a group a problem and be supported in deciding if this is a behaviour that they wish to change. And then be helped in finding alternative behaviours and embedding them as a new habit. I see this as a more empowering, awareness-stretching and skill-building model.

(Herrero's explanation and warnings about the sometimes counter-intuitive workings of rewards and reinforcement are valuable; but do not need to be detailed here.)

Behaviours that are new, introduced perhaps as part of a change program, need to be rewarded (reinforced) constantly when they are present. Behaviours that have been established for a while need to be reinforced intermittently.

Herrero cautions:

- Check if your rewards are going to reinforce. What kind of rewards and recognition are going to have power in your organisation?
- If you reward input, you will get input – not output!
- When you decide to reinforce behaviour X, look for behaviours Y and Z that you may need to stop reinforcing because behaviours Y and Z compete with or are incompatible with behaviour X.
- Divide your behavioural plan into small behavioural steps and reinforce each step. Don't wait to provide reinforcement until the end behaviour appears.
- Check for disconnects between what you say you want to reinforce and what you are actually reinforcing.
- Obsessively practice asking why about what might be reinforcing certain behaviours. Is behaviour A being practiced because it is being reinforced?
- If outputs are well defined (innovation, productivity, etc) reward output behaviour over inputs or efforts to get there.

*iii. Herrero's approach to behavioural-based culture change,*

Step 1. Visualise success and failure and describe them in behavioural terms. (Not in process terms.)

Step 2. Uncover patterns and commonalities.

Step 3. Undertake some sort of behavioural audit to understand the true behavioural DNA of your organisation.

Step 4. Assess the gap and choose a small set of behaviours that have the potential to deal with the key process of change.

Step 5. Have a plan to reinforce existing behaviours within the small set.

Step 6. Seed the behaviours that you don't have, by devising strategies that 'show' them and 'practice' them, even if it feels artificial. You want to make them visible at almost any cost. They will not appear as if by miracle, nor should you rely on the hope that people will embrace them by simple rational understanding of their needs.

Step 7. Reinforce and broadcast any progressive presence of those new behaviours. Even if on a minor scale, this is like a 'proof of concept' stage.

Step 8. Make sure that the management system of rewards and recognition – whether it's the formal performance management and appraisal system or other core informal processes – support the new behaviours.

Step 9. Obsessively refer to the small core set of behaviours as 'non-negotiable'. Make sure that people understand them in their unequivocal meaning.

Step 10. Only go back to review the small non-negotiable set when the new behaviours are stable.

[Could include something here on new habit formation – and especially on the importance of rewards. Note Herrero's advice that it is important to reward effort, not just results.]

## 8. Enabling and turbo-charging your change initiative

### ***i. Addressing the key (primary, critical) challenge for both individuals and the group - Creating a safe group environment***

As we have seen, it is widely known and accepted in the organisation change and culture change professions that the way to shape (adapt, adjust, fine-tune) culture - to implement culture change effectively - is to do the work (have all the conversations needed) in small groups or in a network where people feel safe to talk openly about any suggestions, discomforts or concerns early on.

Such a workgroup climate cannot be mandated from above. It can only emerge from individuals and groups developing and practicing their awareness and skills in working together more effectively.

Such a climate is the first requirement for seeding organisational and culture change.

Only when everyone feels;

- they can trust their colleagues sufficiently to be able to speak up in safety about any suggestions, concerns or discomforts they might experience from the behaviour of a colleague
- safe to take risks and try new things at work
- confident they can trust their colleagues and their workgroup so much that they can be open, honest and feel confident that they won't be placing their employment or career at risk if they are open,

- is the climate going to be conducive to honest, frank conversation, real dialogue and to culture change.

James Hollis in *Creating a Life* wrote that to determine the character of an institution ask: "First, does it truly permit, even encourage dissent? Second, is individual growth promoted?" These are also the key tests or criteria for ascertaining whether a workgroup or organisation has a safe culture where people can confidently speak their truth – speak up about what concerns them or 'speak truth to power'.

A detailed, proven program for creating and sustaining a respectful workplace with colleagues who you know you can trust, where uncomfortable, uncivil behaviour is not accepted or tolerated and where you and your colleagues all feel you can support each other to be who they can be, is set out below (at Attachment A).

In summary, once the group is clear it has a safe, trust-based setting in which to do its work and is aware of the importance of practicing straight-speaking and of bringing to the life of the group other elements of emotional intelligence, regardless of what that work is – a strategic, business or project plan; a more respectful workplace; a workplace where poor performance will not be ignored; etc – the group will be guaranteed that organisational and culture change can be effected. (And incidentally, but importantly, that both the group and its individual members will also be high performing).

### ***ii. External (outside) help required: Specialist support services***

Specialist support services may be required to provide:

- Life skills and support to people who would benefit from practicing learned &/or positive optimism.

- Coaching: To support people who find it difficult to speak with or speak up about a person whose behaviour is making them feel uncomfortable to develop and practice the required skills to do so. Understandably, most people are reluctant if not unable, without expert support, to speak with or speak up about how a person whom they experience as uncivil or a bully even, about their discomfort and concerns. They are frightened of getting even more off-side with that person and thereby exacerbating the discomfort or bullying they have been experiencing. They naturally don't want to do anything to increase the discomfort, fear or pain (anxiety, self-doubt, sleepless nights, loss of self-esteem) that they have been experiencing.
- Access: Everyone needs to have ready access to an experienced, trained person (a specialist workplace relationship mentor/coach or counsellor) with whom they can talk, in confidence, about their experience of behaviours that make them feel uneasy, uncomfortable, concerned. If appropriate, they may also need support in how to frame and initiate the conversation with the person, their boss and/or their workgroup, so that they are experienced as coming from compassion, as not criticising or attacking the source (of their concern) and so that they know how to have the required conversation without making the relationship colder.
- Leadership training, coaching & mentoring of people wanting to be pro-active and ensure they are not accused of - or who have been accused of - bullying.
- In his book *Why Your Corporate Culture Change Isn't Working And What To Do About It* Michael Ward suggests that any culture change work needs relevant professional help and expertise, such as a 'process consultant'\* who can work with the powerful unconscious level where people resist to protect their psyches and block change. (\* A process consultant facilitates the processes of thinking, feeling, learning, developing and empowering people.)

*'DIY culture change doesn't work! ... It is like doing your own brain surgery.'* – according to Ward.

### **iii. Use of Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry and Hays' Positive Change Management approach**

As we have seen, change occurs through human interaction, conversation and communication.<sup>26</sup>

Often the most difficult part of peoples' being involved in or being impacted by change is *irrational*. That is, the 'people' side of change – peoples' hearts and minds, their defensive routines<sup>27</sup>, anxieties and fears - seldom responds predictably or as the leaders of the change would desire or would hope for. So it is important for change programs to provide opportunities for participants to gain understanding, commitment, motivation and motivation – which are gained through genuine involvement. And, as this quote reminds us – *"An attempt to create change ... must always start with the awareness that change is grounded in and shaped by micro-politics on the organisation."*<sup>28</sup> – it is also important in change project processes for stakeholders to have safe, trust-based opportunities such as are provided by

<sup>26</sup> Hays JM & Cowan-Sahadath K, op cit

<sup>27</sup> Chris Argyris pioneered the concept of defensive routines. See Ch. 20 in Beer, M. & N. Nohria, ed., *Breaking the Code of Change*

<sup>28</sup> Robert G. Eccles & Nitin Nohria with James D. Berkley, (1992), Harvard Business School Press

dialogic group processes to work through the micro-politics, the stresses, uncertainties, anxieties and fears that inevitably accompany change. Professor Long's quotation at page 2 is also pertinent: opportunities for having conversation and dialogue enable people to '*air their ideas and feelings – (enable) people to talk about how their work is really affecting them – some terrific things can emerge and people begin to work so much more effectively*'.

The processes of Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Change Management are mechanisms for engaging the hearts, minds and souls of stakeholders. They achieve such engagement by involving people in human interactions, in conversation and communication; in working and learning collectively. These processes facilitate stakeholders to find and create deeper meaning in what they are attempting to do and to achieve. They enable participants to build goodwill and trust between each other.

Through their collaborative engagement in these conversation opportunities and social interactions people get a deeper understanding of the changes and the feeling grows that they are not the hapless victims on whom change is being foisted. They become the best proponents for the change.

Through becoming familiar with and practiced in those methodologies, the participants in the change will become intimately, intensely (emotionally), involved in the change, will adopt, embrace the change and can be said to 'be the change'. The effectiveness of the change will benefit considerably.

As we have also seen and will explore in further detail below, in Bremer's approach, workshops (team, small group) conversations are central. The effectiveness of the culture change process will be considerably enhanced if those conversations are informed and shaped by the participants being skilled in Dialogue and Appreciative Inquiry.

That is to say, the culture change approach and activities detailed above will be more effective the more participants are aware of and practiced in these concepts – Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Positive Change Management (CM+). Each is a recognised catalyst and approach to change in its own right, so when all 3 are combined or even simply drawn on to inform and shape a culture change project, the more likely it will be that the change is effectively and sustainably done.

*"... combining AI and CM+ can substantially improve the likelihood that organisational change and (organisation) development priorities are achieved. Moreover, integrating the techniques ensures that the change process proceeds more smoothly and with fewer deleterious impacts than is often the case in organisational change initiatives. ... both AI and CM+ in their own ways reduce the risk of failure and counterproductive (impacts). ... Together, they can make a meaningful, positive difference, ..."*<sup>29</sup>

The benefits of embedding AI and CM+ in a culture change project are "*further amplified through Dialogue ...*".

These techniques are described in more detail at Attachment C below.

***Hays' on the deep, philosophic underpinnings for the consensus, best practice approach to organisational culture change***

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<sup>29</sup> ibid

Positive change management is founded on the principles, values, and practices of Organisational Development. This essentially means that the change process is healthy and constructive; that people undergoing change learn and develop as a part of the process. They develop abilities and understanding that equip them to deal more effectively with future challenges, including subsequent change.

The CM+ Roadmap is a positive and flexible framework for managing organisational change and innovation. It takes as a starting point that change and learning proceed together: any significant change or transformation involves learning; to learn something new and different requires change. Such change will be seen in new behaviours indicative that new skills, knowledge, or attitudes have been integrated. As with individuals, organisational learning and change can be adaptive and incremental or more radical and fundamental. Both can be vital, and the CM+ Roadmap is geared toward assisting and promoting organisational learning and change.

Implicit in positive change management and the CM+ is the belief that individuals, teams, organisations, and communities can and should have a better life. Mere survival is not sufficient. This means that they are continually in a process of becoming greater. Effective, fulfilled, productive, and encouraging are terms that come to mind. No doubt readers would have their own understandings of lives, homes, and workplaces becoming better, richer, healthier, and stronger. Likewise Organisational Development and Appreciative Inquiry are concerned with more than adequate function. They hold human flourishing as paramount value and aspiration.

Those who believe the workplace cannot or should not be in the business of flourishing are probably not very content themselves. With limited foresight, it is reasonable to suppose they impede the health and fulfilment of those who work for and with them, consciously or unwittingly.

As suggested in this paper, positive change management and the CM+ Roadmap incorporate the spirit and substance of Appreciative Inquiry and Dialogue. Successful and enduring change hinges on stakeholder adoption. The best way to achieve adoption amongst stakeholders is to have them "be the change" desired; that is, to have them intensely and intimately involved in the change from conception through to evaluation. Essentially this implies putting into practice the highest aspirations and desired outcomes of the change as part of the change process. To reiterate two key principles of organisational change management of relevance here: (1) Use the targets of change as the agents of change and (2) the process is the solution. In summary, sustainable change depends on stakeholder buy-in, best achieved through collaborative engagement. Effective collaboration relies on constructive dialogues and appreciating inquiry.

Moving toward positive change management that incorporates abundant stakeholder involvement, Appreciative Inquiry, and Dialogue often means changing the way we change--itself a journey in learning and change, as reported in Hays (2004a; 2006a; 2006b). It is a trip worth considering. These approaches change the way we think about and, thus, undertake change. And, this can make a profound difference. Bushe and Kassam (2005) concluded, for example, that Appreciative Inquiry has been shown to help leaders "accomplish their change goals and do so within time frames way beyond what many who work at and study organizational change would expect as reasonable" (p. 176).



#### iv. 'Viral change'<sup>30</sup>

*'... new transformational strategies do not make a difference until people think and act differently.'*

- **It is about changing behaviour**

Leandro Herrero's viral change approach (see previous Chapter) is based on this thinking:

- New ideas and behaviours can be spread, like an infection, that leads to new routines (new behaviours, culture) being adopted widely. So that change management can be seen as the 'orchestrated creation of an epidemic of' new behaviours or culture.
- *"Experience shows that behaviour change in a large (system) can be more effectively achieved by initially focusing the required behaviour change(s) on those employees (roles) who have most influence over ... where the change is needed and who can facilitate the change fastest."*
- It is as if change agents in key, influential, visible roles have a new behaviour (imagine it as a virus) that they in a random, non-linear way infect others with, on contact - like a virus infects people and whole populations.
- The mechanisms include social copying, modelling, imitation, reinforcement of new behaviours, the creation of 'tipping points', etc. Engineered and distributed influence is a key engine of change.

Herrero recognises that there may be numerous mechanisms or processes at work that can combine to drive social copying.

Herrero's unconventional approach is to focus on identifying and bringing to life in a non-linear (viral) way a small number (say up to 5) of the key behaviours you want to be features of your new culture – by articulating the behaviours and then rewarding and reinforcing them, to produce the culture you want. Start with a few key behaviours and embed them quickly using reinforcement actions or mechanisms. These new behaviours become stable, widespread and have the capacity to quickly (say, in 3 – 6 months) create new routines, rules and norms which will manifest as 'culture change'.

He advocates the use of informal networks and asking influential, activist Change Champions to support and facilitate the rapid spread and take up of the desired new, non-negotiable behaviours. He advocates management working alongside – briefing them, asking them to help, trusting them - and devolving to these Change Champions as much leadership in embedding ('infecting') the new desired behaviours as possible, just as we earlier advocated the use of empowered teams to effect change. People who are regularly interacting collaboratively are the common vehicle or transmission mechanism for culture change or any desired change or improvement.

As Herrero points out culture change does not need to be a big project, painful, drawn out or expensive. Try to avoid seeing or naming it as a program. Having no single name for the activity is good. (Wise, experienced change project managers have avoided for many years giving their projects a name. Call it whatever you like from day to day, context to context.)

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<sup>30</sup> Herrero, Leandro, 'Viral Change - The alternative to slow, painful and unsuccessful management of change in organisations', 2008

The flavours of Herrero's approach are reflected in his final paragraph:

*"... creating that wonderful, distributed leadership across the organisation, in which networks of small worlds lead in all directions, all the time, without reference to a command and control centre. In mastering the power of language, behaviours, tipping points, infections and new cultures."*

**vi. Sharpening the focus of behaviour change**

McKinsey's Rome Office similarly report that experience shows that behaviour change in a large organisation can be more effectively achieved by initially focusing the required behaviour change(s) on those employees (roles) who have most influence over the daily work where the change is needed and who can facilitate the change fastest.<sup>31</sup> This notion is aligned with Hays' and Herrero's advocacy of the use of 'change champions'.

Identifying these employees or roles can be a challenge; it may well not be self-evident or logical which employees (roles) are the most central to modelling the required culture (behavioural) change for optimum effectiveness.

It provides an opportunity to create a network of change champions, a community of practice such as a virtual team or online forum of the pivotal employees (roles), to drive, model, embed and ripple out across the organisation the behavioural change required. This initial community may be a valuable source of advice in identifying and prioritising the subsequent places, roles, employees for focusing behaviour change and for fine-tuning the articulation of the required behaviours for each of those communities following in the roll-out.

**vi. Pushing & pulling: The pursuit of stretch business goals can drive and reinforce culture change<sup>32</sup>**

It is suggested by Tobias<sup>33</sup> that in order to produce high-value and sustainable change it is necessary to connect new behaviours with measurable business goals.

He argues that top down or push programs *'fail because changing behaviours is hard when employees don't see immediate results or positive feedback for their efforts.'*

He suggests that change programs are often more successful when they combine business results and behavioural change because they reinforce each other in the short term and can sustain organizational effectiveness in the future.

To illustrate his point here, he describes a real life situation where a new CEO wanted to both change the culture and lift profitability. He understood that it was important to provide continual reinforcement so that his employees would not revert to their old behaviours. He challenged his managers to expand the business and required them to show significant results in 100 days. And he required all employees to take responsibility for end-to-end

<sup>31</sup> McKinsey's Rome office: Marco Gardini and Marco Marricchi, 2011

<sup>32</sup> Based on an article by Claudio Avila Tobias, a partner at Schaffer Consulting, 2013

<sup>33</sup> Based on an article by Claudio Avila Tobias, a partner at Schaffer Consulting, 2013

profitability because each function was doing its own job and there was no clear accountability for each function's contribution to the company's overall profitability.

To accomplish these goals it was necessary for people to work in new ways and to change their mindsets. They had to move away from the low-performing products they knew well, to rethink pricing, make alliances with other companies to reach new customers and to market and sell in non-traditional markets. His employees now needed to collaborate across countries and functions to take advantage of products and talent that are already successful elsewhere in the organization segments.

The reinforcing of (i) the culture change required by (ii) the strong business improvement imperative achieved a successful outcome.

Faced with this challenge, people found through that through their new-found collaborative behaviours they could use knowledge from other areas to take advantage of products and talent that are already successful elsewhere in the organization.

Companies normally tackle this kind of challenge by defining the behaviours, communicating them and reinforcing them with external incentives such as performance management, learning and development programs or posters that communicate the organization's values. Tobias suggests it is a leap of faith hoping that people will adopt those behaviours and that results will eventually follow. It's kind of like pushing the behaviours and inflicting culture change on employees. At its best, this strategy, Tobias argues, will result in compliance and modest results, where employees behave a certain way because they have to, but they likely will not internalize the new values to guide behaviour.

Creating a culture like this is a goal for many companies. Yet the changes did not come from a push program for cultural change; new behaviours were driven by efforts to improve company performance.

This is about the challenge to achieve stretch business goals driving the formation and reinforcement of the desired cultural behaviours. This is a pull strategy — to respond to a leader's challenge to perform at a higher level, people must step outside of their current behavioural paradigm and work together in new ways.

For managers who want to increase organizational effectiveness, a balanced push-pull strategy can drive the required cultural and behavioural shifts involved at the same time. Here is how to do it.

Inspire people. Explain why shifting the culture is so important and clarify what kind of culture is desirable.

Once this is clear, leaders should help employees make the connection between those behaviours and the results the organization both the direction and the incentive for cultural change.

Challenge people. Make specific demands to achieve ambitious short-term results that will elicit the new behaviours to make culture change real and practical.

Leaders should be ready to model desired changes, as they will have an important role in reinforcing the new behaviours. They should spend time with people re-programming the

basic assumptions that guide successful behaviours. This is where the traditional push approach comes into play.

Leaders who want to drive cultural change need to shift their own mindsets to be successful. In a combined push-pull approach, culture change is more than an imposed means to accomplish future results. Culture change is both an enabler and an outcome of employees' experiences working to achieve extraordinary results.

To summarise,

- Define cultural attributes
- Clearly articulate the characteristics and behaviours you want people to begin demonstrating.
- Model behaviours
- Mindfully shift your own behaviour to demonstrate these behaviours publicly and consistently.
- Continuously monitor
- Pay attention to others' behaviours and observe when aspirational attributes are being demonstrated or not.
- Reinforce through dialogue
- Share your observations with individuals and discuss the situations when they did and did not demonstrate them.

## 9. A Practitioner's Guide on how to work on organisational and culture change: Drawing on Bremer's, Hays' and Herrero's insights, practices and wisdom

In her book<sup>34</sup> Bremer sets out a comprehensive, practical methodology and tools for reviewing a group's or an organisation's culture, determining what changes in the culture are preferred and working together, 'co-creating' (working participatively and collaboratively), to achieve the required culture shifts.

Her approach is aligned with our own thinking and approach outlined in this paper. (Coming from different ends of the earth and vastly different career backgrounds, experienced organisational change consultants, both academics with standing internationally and local practitioners can't all be wrong! The coincidence of our insights and learnings must underline their validity and credibility.)

Her approach also reflects the thinking and approach outlined by other thought leaders such as J. Martin Hays and Leandro Herrero in their papers and publications referred to and summarised here.<sup>35</sup>

Like Hays' and Herrero's approach, Bremer's is not mechanistic but organic and non-linear. *"We develop a plan for change that will never be done."*<sup>36</sup> Their insight is that it is futile to try to be didactic and prescriptive when it is impossible to design exactly how people will feel, what meanings will prevail and what behavioural patterns might emerge from discussions, from trial and error.

But although those who engage in culture change are *'building the bridge while walking on it'*, provided there is leadership commitment and the small group workshops and processes are engaging and have integrity, *'you may trust this process and walk the bridge safely'*.

The following is an overview of Bremer's approach:

1. In the context of a sense of urgency about the need to look at the organisation's culture, conduct workshops in small groups:
  - 'OCAI Workshops'<sup>37</sup> – Inclusive, small groups of staff from all levels meet for 1- 2 days or regularly for 2 hours each (say) a fortnight; led by internal leaders, if suitable facilitators are available from within (stimulates ownership) or by external facilitator (easier for them to intervene, ignore taboos, draw attention to issues in the current culture). [Other proprietary tools for assessing culture that provide a basis for similar discussions are available. Phillips & Smallridge<sup>38</sup> used the Human Synergetics Organisational Culture OCI tool.)
  - If the workshops are run so that people strive for consensus, everybody participates and engages strongly, gets ready to drive, accept responsibility for, takes ownership of and commits to be the change.

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<sup>34</sup> Bremer, M

<sup>35</sup> Hayes, J. Martin, ...

<sup>36</sup> Bremer M

<sup>37</sup> OCAI is an on-line tool to identify key dimensions of organisational culture. It provides a picture of the existing and desired changed culture; and a basis for reporting any change.

<sup>38</sup> Phillips C. & Smallridge M., Unpublished paper *'Culture Changer through Personal Transformation'*

- As explained above, Bremer recognises the importance of safe environments to enable such 'striving', 'readying' and 'accepting':  
*"You need to have a safe group where people are willing to participate and share ideas."*

## 2. The workshops involve –

- **Engaging everyone in them (in the workshops).** Agree on protocols for the workshop – for a productive group process based on the conventions of 'Dialogue' - respectful listening; comment on issues, don't criticise individuals; how can we make this space safe for everyone to share their thoughts openly, with confidence they will not be laughed at, scorned, teased? etc .
- **Understanding current culture down to the level of typical behaviours.** Understand, describe the current culture. Share awareness about current work habits, attitudes, thinking, beliefs, expectations and culture. Work with what behaviours are experienced during the workshop - this being a characteristic of the culture. Encourage metaphors, drawings, play-acting, stories of typical incidents, events. Reach consensus.
- **Understanding the preferred culture down to the level of typical behaviours.** Describe the preferred culture down to the level of everyday behaviours; what to do, what not to do. What are we flexible about; what is non-negotiable.
- **Agreeing on how all elements** (identity, culture, beliefs, behaviours, capabilities) **need to be different.**
- **Identifying and resolving obstacles.** Explore and identify any cultural elements, beliefs, behaviours that will get in the way of where the group wants to go. Ask why haven't we already adopted the proposed new behaviour. What else do we need to do to remove blockers?
- **Agreeing on new key behaviours that will make a difference.** Agree on what to sustain; on what small actions or behaviours we can start doing or stop doing that will make a difference to make the preferred culture a reality. Get quick wins by taking small steps to build optimism.
- **Feeling the urgency to change.** Get clear on the drivers, reasons for change and for the preferred behaviours, etc, in depth. Surface and work through any doubts; everyone will need to walk the talk and if we don't believe in some aspect of the agreed change, it will show up in our behaviour. (One on one interventions and coaching by leaders &/or outside professionals may be appropriate if core beliefs are found to be a blocker.)
- **Committing to model, correct and coach** each other in living the new behaviours. What will I do differently today, tomorrow? Develop metaphors and stories to convey the new ways of doing things.
- **Looking for** what (at least one key behaviour that) will provide **major leverage** for the change.
- Agreeing to **encourage and reward** (and how to reward) ('reinforce') modelling, practice, demonstrations of the new behaviours by formal and

informal leaders. *'Enter a positive spiral of small changes – fuelled by the belief that change is possible and that every individual and their behaviour makes a difference in'* embedding the culture.

- **Providing peer support.** Anchor the new behaviours in routines and systems to make them (and the new culture) sustainable.
- **Measuring, sharing and celebrating** widely a few key indicators. Include some fun metrics like recognising the first team to ... . Give positive but credible (genuine) feedback.
- But please note: *'You are never done!'* If you allow inappropriate old ways (habits) to persist, you will revert to the *'old business as usual, damaging faith in change processes, management and in the organisation.'* We need to **keep on communicating, copying, coaching, correcting and modelling – living the new culture.**

### **What happens?**

As Herrero has described, these processes, activities, behaviours create, in a non-hierarchical organisational network or group, a dynamic of viral change. The dynamic (of change) is fed and rewarded (nurtured) from all directions so participants at all levels experience and influence the changed ways of doing things. *"Simple behaviours can spread easily in a non-linear way."* Small actions – involving a change in behaviour – can reinforce each other, trigger momentum that builds to produce huge and changed outcomes. Leaders demonstrate (through their behaviours) that they have each personally changed and are committed to the new, changed culture.

### **Why it works**

Hays explains in his books and articles (*a key overview paper summarising his insights is at Attachment G in hard copy versions of this paper only*), that successful and enduring change hinges on stakeholder adoption.

The best way to achieve adoption amongst stakeholders (all employees) is to have them "be the change" desired; that is, to have them intensely and intimately involved in the change from conception through to evaluation. Essentially this implies putting into practice the highest aspirations and desired outcomes of the change as part of the change process.

To reiterate, two key principles of organisational change management of relevance here are:

- (i) Use the targets of change as the agents of change
- (ii) The process is the solution.

In summary, sustainable change depends on stakeholder buy-in, best achieved at an emotional level through collaborative engagement through group processes. Effective collaboration relies on constructive dialogues and appreciating inquiry.

### **How it works in practice**

Once a workplace leader and the workgroup have created a group environment where people trust one another and feel safe to speak up, people can work continuously to observe, monitor, discuss, explore, understand, reflect, evaluate and adjust their culture – how they are working together and how the many elements that are shaping their work

environment, behaviours, relationships, services, outputs are supporting their own and their wider organisational expectations and requirements.

The group may regularly take time together simply to reflect on these 'hows'. By doing this – modelling, practicing and experiencing these activities regularly – they get really good at doing them.

Alternatively, and/or occasionally, at these regular discussion-and-reflection-on-our-culture sessions, the group may find it helpful to use a particular lens through which to look at their culture and how it is serving them and their organisation.

One such lens that has been found useful is values. (But they could use as a lens any current focus of the organisation such as the key elements of innovation, employee engagement or high performance.) Using the corporate values, if they have been espoused, or their own, locally-developed values or team expectations statement, group members are regularly invited, encouraged and rewarded for bringing forward matters (issues, concerns) that they want to test against their colleagues' interpretations and understandings of what their team's protocol means or requires.

Having created a safe, trust-based work environment, the manager or team facilitator invites team colleagues to use any element of the preferred lens as a reference point, 'hook' or prompt for bringing up with their colleagues a concern or issue related to the reference point or 'hook'.

The manager invites team members to respond to this issue or concern by sharing honestly and openly their feelings on it. They are asked to also talk about how they are experiencing each other through the conversation.

Team members are also encouraged to have such conversations one-on-one and/or in small groups away from the regular team meeting.

If a team member feels uncomfortable raising the matter one-on-one or with the group, he/she is expected to ask the group to help them air, share and tackle their concern.

Having such a conversation may be difficult for some; skilling, practice and coaching will help. (Emotional and social intelligence capabilities are being developed here.)

Through this process everyone benefits from the regular airing and discussion of the organisation's or team's values, expectations and behaviours.

It is through this regular and constant use of the lens – whatever that lens may be or whatever the sequence of different lenses used - that individuals and the group expand their awareness of and tolerance for what the lens means to others (their colleagues); learn through their participation in conversation with each other to engage with the lens (values, protocols, expectations statement), to make meaning of the lens through witnessing and experience colleagues doing just that and so build ownership of the lens and embed it in their workplace behaviours and relationships.

This activity is effectively shaping the culture continuously. (The culture being, of course, the sum of everyone's expectations and behaviours.)



The essence of this approach is that it is an organic, bottom-up, interactive process that empowers people through their self-regulating of their workplace culture. It is therefore consistent with the approaches detailed above. It affirms respectful, trusting relationships; it builds staff engagement and empowerment, which are key to high performing workgroups.

At a personal, individual level, the approach is about creating and maintaining a workplace environment where everyone can have all the conversations they need to have to contribute their best. Through having these regular opportunities to experience others practicing and themselves practice their skills in talking openly about issues and concerns, everyone learns and is equipped to pro-actively head off and prevent problems such as potential bullying situations before they are repeated and actually become bullying.

## 10. A more emergent, capability development or OD approach

I am also attracted to a more emergent approach to culture change than is represented by Bremer's approach, with its reliance on the assessment of the culture and the targeting of specific adjustments in elements of the culture.

An emergent approach recognises that rather than define and bring about specific culture shifts to remedy an identified gap, it is more effective to equip the workgroup with the tools, skills, support and know-how so they can, themselves, continuously - as an integral part of their daily life at work - surface, identify, understand and work on (adjust) the numerous shapers of the culture to address particular problems and challenges, so that the culture better supports changing organisational needs and priorities. It is continuously improving and adapting.

The thinking behind – the rationale – for this approach is recognition that there are many intangible, complexly inter-related, slippery, ever-changing, multi-faceted dynamics (forces) and structures (roles, delegations, power relationships, expectations, values, etc) at work that are shaping the culture constantly. It is therefore suggested it is impractical and impossible to adequately identify, understand and adjust these forces to support the behavioural or culture changes required. They are too slippery, un-knowable and ever-changing. Moreover, the impacts of planned interventions are unpredictable and time-consuming and can be problematic.

For these reasons it may be more effective to provide the tools, skills and opportunities for members of a workgroup to work on problematic or challenging aspects of the culture as they arise and as part of regular processes – that is, as an integral part of daily business-as-usual work – than to take the ABCD problem or gap identification approach involving a once-off initiative to define and address a list of specific cultural issues or gaps.

The focus here is not on defining and deliverable a specific culture shift to close a gap. Rather it is on equipping the workplace with the tools, skills, processes and know-how to enable its members to identify, work on and close culture gaps and execute culture changes; as and when required.

Our experience is that even if the culture gap (where actual behaviours or culture fall short of the desired behaviours or culture) can be meaningfully defined, it can be very difficult to plan and execute a program of work to bridge the gap sustainably. Elements of a culture can be so unfathomably inter-related and multi-faceted that the impacts of planned interventions are often unpredictable, may be problematic and take time to embed.

If, however, it is considered that the culture gap or adjustment can be meaningfully defined and that the required behaviours can be readily and sustainably effected and need to endure for a considerable period of time, with roles and structures brought into alignment, Bremer's approach seems appropriate. But if these conditions do not apply, it would be wise to adopt a more emergent approach, focussing also on embedding the skills and practice of continuous culture change in the workforce.

## 11. Personal transformations, new or strengthened organisational capabilities required

[See above **Chapter 6. i. Challenges at the level of the individual** and **Chapter 6. v. The need for a specialist enterprise culture change capability** where we touched on the importance of developing and maintaining a corporate or enterprise capability to work on culture and organisational change.]

Many of us will need to change and/or benefit from changing the way we think – our beliefs, 'rules', expectations<sup>39</sup> - and grow our emotional intelligence in order that we can develop and practice the agreed new behaviours required by the new project or new culture and so that the new behaviours will become embedded, automatic, routinized and be sustained.

From my years' coaching many hundreds of executive and other staff, I have found that many people's efforts to drive and execute organisation and culture change would be enhanced by their having the benefit of skilling, coaching, practice, feedback and growth in some or all of the following areas:

- Self-awareness
- Self-confidence
- Finding their courage to voice
- Empathy
- Compassion
- Listening; capacity to suspend judgement and engage in Dialogue
- Awareness on their own intrinsic rules and expectations and assessing their efficacy
- The power of being vulnerable – not knowing; asking for help
- Habits – formation (creating new habits)
- Trust building
- Living in the moment – the 'here and now'
- Political behaviour
- Authentic behaviour
- Reflection
- Mindfulness
- Collaborative behaviours

The personal challenge facing a manager of or involved in organisational change is to learn to trust, to ask staff (colleagues) for help and to let go or relinquish the control mindset or paradigm, if that still influences their thinking and approach.<sup>40</sup>

What the world of organisational change management knows is:

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<sup>39</sup> Beliefs, 'rules', expectations can sometimes lock us into certain behaviours. For example, a person who believes it is their duty to not forgive but rather to punish someone who is perceived to have 'wronged' them, may well be unable to forgive that person and let it (the 'wrong') go and as a result it is likely they will be unable to adopt more collaborative behaviours towards everyone in the group.

<sup>40</sup> This material emerged from email exchanges between the CEO of an organisation that had recently abandoned one of the worlds' largest IT-based change projects, Dr Jay Hays and the author.

- Most change initiatives fail. (It is widely agreed among writers in the field that the failure rate is between 50% and 80%.)
- They generally take a long time and cost 'an arm and a leg'. (Both in terms of \$'s and human pain and suffering)
- They are extremely hard. (Change weariness or exhaustion is a standard concern of most texts on change management.)

This newly emergent mindset is not intuitive, especially not for those practitioners with the old mindset firmly embedded. It could well be quite a wrench and counter-cultural to many; especially to those whose professional paradigm focusses on mechanical and engineering processes. (Hays suggests the distinction can be represented as a concern for boxes (roles, positions, things) and lines (hard wired connections, linking pipes, wires, flows etc between the boxes) on a whiteboard, on the one hand (the mechanical, engineering lens) contrasted with a focus on what is going on in the white space between the boxes and pipes or wires, which is where human minds, relationships and organisational culture are represented.)

Which means that for a leader or manager to be able to adopt and execute the new approach to OCM, they will need to be able to set aside their logical, rational, orderly mind and expectations about the things and dynamics (levers) that are involved in change and that they will need to deal with to be successful and become effective in dealing with peoples' beliefs, values, habits, behaviours, needs, motivation, expectations and relationships.

The successful change manager now needs to appreciate that:

- While the logic underpinning thinking and behaviour makes sense at a surface level, deep flaws in the logic may well remain largely unquestioned.
- Such deep flaws may well reveal themselves in recurring and unanticipated problems, mistakes and failures that have conventionally been perceived as flowing from human resistance, indolence, disinterest, incapability or a lack of other types of resources.
- We often are unaware that we are exhausting ourselves and our resources trying to fix these surface problems when they are really symptoms of deeper issues.
- Often our pre-occupation with trying to deal with these insoluble problems prevents the change manager from seeing and resolving the actual underlying problem.
- We are often trapped in beliefs and expectations that are fundamentally flawed, and our behaviour both perpetuates and is influenced by the flawed system of our own creation.
- Change leaders can only get transformative, sustained change if they surface and work on the fundamental, underlying organisational issues.
- Transformation implies dramatic shifts in the substance of an entity; deep form and structural change, changes in beliefs, values and thinking.
- You cannot solve complex problems with the same thinking that produced them in the first place.
- You may have to first work on changing (growing) yourself and your mindset, before you proceed with any real chance of success.

- Specifically, the leader or manager of change may well need to work for some time on their habits, attitudes, values, behaviours – particularly any that could tend to the leader subjugating the led. To put this another way:
  - The change leader will need to be mindful about ever assuming that –
    - People cannot or will not do the right thing if given freedom
    - He/she knows better; has all the answers or is smarter than others
    - If they keep pressing the point or demanding things that people will come to accept their dictates
    - People just want to be led
    - Decisiveness is more important than reason.
- Because if the leader does make and act on such assumptions, he/she will be sure to act in ways that disempower and distance others; that cause people to disengage, reluctantly comply, depart. Which will trigger a downward spiral because these reactions (of the perceived 'strong leader') to his/her behaviour will in turn make the leader drive the change in even more self-undermining ways.

The change manager who has a good chance of success appreciates that:

- What people need most is a chance to grow and develop, to have a voice in things that matter, to earn a sense of ownership over their organisational life, to make a difference.
- This will never happen as long as people are marginalised from the real work that needs to be done, including work such as that traditionally regarded as the responsibility of the leader, namely the solving of tough problems and the making of hard decision.
- When people design their future, they are more likely to understand, value and enact it.
- If you (the leader, change manager) give your people a little, they will demand a lot; not a lot of you, but rather a lot of themselves.
- This is what the future of our society and organisations depends on: a dynamic, empowered and capable society.

So what do I need to do to be a successful, effective change manager?

- (1) Ask yourself regularly, am I at risk of not seeing opportunities - or of refusing - to place the challenge of finding and implementing solutions in the hands of those who must live with them?
- (2) Do the personal work necessary to grow your self-awareness, self-knowledge and understanding around (1).
- (3) Place the problem facing the organisation in the hands of employees and entrust and empower them to solve it.
- (4) Accept that some may not want the responsibility; some may lack skills or confidence. And that is OK; not everybody is ready, willing and able; but they can become so with training and coaching. The whole purpose of this approach to leading and change is to build capacity and goodwill.
- (5) Be assured that many will step up to the challenge and produce solutions much greater of at least with higher probabilities of success than outsiders, leaders, technical experts or consultants could generate.

***A new capability is required in many (most?) organisations***

Not surprisingly, new insights, perspectives, understandings, awareness, ideas and approaches have emerged from research, professional practitioners' expanding and deepening their body of knowledge and from the experience and study of thousands of change projects of all sizes in all sectors; all aimed at maximising the chances of a change initiative being a success. The emergence and convergence of some old and new professions on the challenges of organisational change management (OCM) have doubtless contributed to this.

The long standing professional paradigms of project management, human resource management, organisational development (often rooted in 'command and control' thinking) have been joined in understanding and re-inventing OCM by paradigms from the behavioural and neurological sciences and fields such as psychology, psychoanalysis, brain science and habit formation, human relationships, emotional and social intelligence, human engagement and motivation, etc.

Consequently, it is fundamental and essential that organisational leaders ensure they have engaged thought-leaders and experienced practitioners across these fields, along with the support resources (e.g. coaches) that they will require to support their leadership of any change initiative.

[I propose to insert here material along lines of Prosci's recent thinking about the need for enterprise (corporate) capability in organisational and culture change.]

## 12. Testing the recommended approaches to change

Hays has articulated an encompassing set of values and principles for organisational change that provide a benchmark for testing our recommended approach to culture change:

The two fundamental change principles advanced by Hays (2004a; 2006a; 2006b; 2010b):

1. Use the targets of change as the instruments of change.
2. The process is the solution.

Organised around these core versatile and encompassing principles, positive change management also incorporates and embodies a set of values that undergird how change is conceived and put into practice. These values influence the vision of successful change—its aspired outcomes—the TO BE or ideal future state in change management jargon, as well as its implementation. They are, thus, important to what change achieves and how it achieves it. The idealist believes you cannot separate the ends from the means. An ardent practitioner would, for example, employ, model, and reinforce positive, appreciative behaviours and methods in the AS IS or current state as an instrumental means of transforming to the desired future state. This is, in fact, what the illustrative case presented in the next section reveals.

Table 1 presents a set of assumptions, values, and principles deduced from the field of Organisational Development and from the theory and practice of Appreciative Inquiry and Dialogue.

<p>Look for and bring out the best in every individual / group, and situation.</p> <p>Seek to deeply understand the system or problem before deciding courses of action, acting to change, or attempting to fix problems.</p> <p>There is much more intelligence and capability in teams and groups than in [single] individuals.</p> <p>People deserve care and respect at all times.</p> <p>Everyone wants to do a good job and make a meaningful contribution.</p> <p>People are brilliant; their brilliance too vital to ignore.</p> <p>Perceived resistance and recalcitrance are due to lack of understanding and, perhaps, alienation, not innate inability or</p>	<p>The preponderance of communication in any setting or organisation is anything but dialogue. This needs to be replaced by genuine dialogue.</p> <p>Dialogue requires skill, commitment, and opportunity, none of which are often present or sustained.</p> <p>Every problem and every change is an opportunity to learn and to build capability amongst staff and other stakeholders. This opportunity is seldom realised.</p> <p>Time spent up front is time saved later on.</p> <p>Don't pay a consultant to do what you could do. If you must hire in expertise, ensure the process affords sufficient transfer of knowledge and skill.</p> <p>At the heart of every successful change effort is a compelling vision of a better future. Compelling visions are seldom conferred and never purchased, but emerge from those who</p>
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<p>unwillingness. They are "givens" only when invited.</p> <p>People tend to focus on the negative (half-glass empty). It can be much more constructive to focus on the positives, strengths, and successes (half-glass full).</p> <p>People tend to "jump to task" and are quick to begin problem-solving.<sup>41</sup> This needs to be minimised, supplanted by commitment and disciplined adherence to more thorough and inclusive dialogic inquiry.</p> <p>A fundamental objective of all change and learning endeavours should be to empower.</p>	<p>will strive to accomplish them and enjoy the rewards of achievement.</p> <p>The most important conversations are generally not had in organisations; but they can and should be.</p> <p>Successful, sustainable change comes from understanding; understanding comes from Dialogue. Resolution of complex problems requires diversity of perspective and skill best brought to bear through the concerted effort of Dialogue and dialogic inquiry.</p>
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**Table 1.** Positive principles and values inherent in Appreciative Inquiry, Dialogue, and the CM+ Roadmap.

It is clear that our proposed human-centred approach to change in organisations is consistent with the values and meets all the requirements identified by Hays.

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<sup>41</sup> The feelings associated with "productivity" (busy-ness) are inherently rewarding and the [pre]occupation with task may distract from real problems and detract from meaningful problem-solving and solution-finding. These dynamics comprise a grave and insidious vicious cycle.



### 13. Selecting or crafting your approach to organisation and culture change

There is an infinite variety of changes that organisations wish to pursue, some more intense, mission-critical, requiring varying depths of intervention, than others. There are many different approaches and consultancies to choose from to design and implement change. There is an infinite variety of history, effectiveness and baggage from earlier change initiatives. There are probably as many organisational cultures as there are organisations and units within organisations and so many different facets to an organisation's culture that it would be foolhardy to try to identify and list them.

Consequently, it would be unwise, I think, to adopt the notion that one size or approach to organisational change or culture change will be best for any particular organisation or category of organisations (however categorised).

My thinking is that once the fundamental foundation (requirement) for having a healthy, values-based, learning, innovative, highly engaged, high performing organisation with constantly improving (collaborative) relationships is in place – that is, when all staff are regularly participating fully and dialoguing (with trust between all members) in a safe small group - each organisation should consult its workforce, consider insights from its culture assessment and pick from the turbocharger processes and the recommended emergent approach outlined above, those approaches that strike them as helpful and develop their own tailored, idiosyncratic, fit-for-purpose change strategy.

You probably can't go wrong if you remain mindful of Covey's insight – *'Today managers (need to) recognise that people have minds and hearts and spirits, not just bodies to be controlled and manipulated. People today want a sense of meaning, a sense of voice, a sense of belonging to an innovative community that adds true value.'*

## 14. Conclusions & Suggestions

- 1) The use-by date for mechanistic, top-down models of organisation change is long past.
- 2) Successful and enduring change hinges on stakeholder adoption, personal change and small group processes.

The best way to achieve this is have stakeholders intensely and intimately involved in the change from its conceptions to its evaluation through collaborative engagement and dialogue and attending closely to the people and the process. This is best done through the stakeholders engaging actively in the change in small groups.

- 3) Underlying the thinking throughout this paper and all the approaches canvassed is my passion, shared with all the quoted authorities, for creating environments and adopting approaches that 'enhance the individual, that bring out the best in us and that host our talents and our dreams.' (Herrero, op cit.)

We have canvassed elsewhere in this paper many pieces of advice and guidance – wisdom even, I hope – in how to do culture change.

There are also a number of possibly surprising and counter-intuitive pieces of advice provided by thought-leaders in the field that are worthwhile setting out here.

- i) Try to avoid giving any change project a name. Refer to it using whatever phrase fits the immediate context. Encourage and allow others to refer to it by whatever label suits their purpose and taste. Use many ways of referring to the project. I prefer to see a project as business as usual – simply what we are doing this year to improve our performance. Herrero cautions that change management labels, including culture change labels, create a significant level of antibodies in the organisation.
- ii) Resist the commonly held belief that a major, expensive change management project requires equally large interventions. Herrero warns us to resist linear thinking and the assumption of proportionality; that inputs need to be proportional to outputs or the scale of the change to be delivered. In his '*viral change*', behaviours-based approach, working on a small set of behaviours (levers) can generate great change in a non-linear way.
- iii) As long as leaders are not wholly opposed to the change, it is not essential that they all be whole-heartedly on board. When they see the effectiveness of small group, Change Champions and networks – the distributed leadership model at work - in changing the culture for the better, sceptical leaders will become supporters. Suspend judgement til that happens.
- iv) Accept that it is natural for people to resist change when they are anxious or uncomfortable about the change compromising their sense of competence, valued relationships, self-esteem, their perception of their standing in the eyes of others, etc.
- v) Culture change does not have to take a long time and be painful. It can happen in 3-6 months. It does not need to take a life-time, 30 years, as I had earlier imagined.

- vi) While communication and training are valuable, a change program does not need to look like a huge communication and training program. Focus instead of describing the desired behaviours, rewarding and embedding them.
- vii) Do not assume that new behaviours will be adopted once new processes and systems are in place. People will often simply continue to do things as before. New processes and systems do not create new behaviours. We need to have new behaviours in place to support new processes and systems.
- viii) Do not assume that people will be rational and follow logical, rational steps towards changing and improving things. Rational understanding does not guarantee emotional integration or behavioural exchange.

## Attachment A

### Practitioner's Guide 1: Creating a safe workgroup climate & using group processes to facilitate culture change

For workgroup leaders and members to be able to create and maintain the required safe climate in their workgroup, they need to be able to;

- assess whether their workgroup colleagues feel sufficiently safe and trusting for them to be able to apply the skills involved in speaking up about concerns and
- be confident about tackling any gap – making good any shortfall – in the workgroup climate and
  - they need to experience the formation of their workgroup as a team, with clear expectations and protocols.
  - Team members need to have a sense of ownership of the team protocols and a sense of empowerment to help one another use them – bring them to life – to create the culture, the high performing, bullying-free team they want to be a member of. Out of that sense of ownership and empowerment, engagement will grow, the culture will be shaped and uncivil behaviour (bullying, etc) will be surfaced and dealt with early, before it is experienced as a performance-sapping dark force in the group.

The steps involve team members participating in various short processes. They need to experience the steps, if they are to experience safety and trust in the group.

When people have that sense of safety and trust, they can start to speak openly, coming from compassion, to bring all of themselves (their personal and professional selves; their emotional intelligence and courage as well as their logical, reasoning and intellectual powers) to their workplace to help them to shape the culture, to surface and understand concerns, performance blockers, issues, each other and support each other to address and resolve them. They can relax, experiment, apply, enjoy and enhance the full range of their intelligence, expertise, resourcefulness, insights, talents, professionalism – particularly their emotional intelligence.

To be able to shape their team culture and have fully effective skill development and high performance or momentum-sustaining planning days, management or project team meetings, Branch meetings, experiential (highly participatory) professional development, etc, workgroups (teams) need to be continuously learning and practicing these skills through such group processes.

What is effectively going on through this process is that not only is the team culture being shaped but also workplace health and safety is being improved by giving people understanding about the importance of speaking up, equipping them to speak up pro-actively about their concerns without jeopardising their relationship with the perceived perpetrator of the uncivil behaviour, of listening to and supporting each other collaboratively and by giving them the tools and experience to ensure they have and continue to have the workplace culture that they want and one where it is demonstrably safe to speak up about concerns and support each other in addressing them effectively.

#### *Small group processes*

This use of psycho-dynamically informed, small group processes facilitates, encourages and assists workgroups to not only focus on how they can work together to address relationships

issues; to be more collaboratively but to also become, along the way – almost as a by-product – even more high performing.

These processes enable individuals and groups to learn experientially<sup>42</sup> to undertake organisational culture change in the interests of creating and maintaining a more engaged, committed, challenged and rewarded workforce. The rewards from this include people having better relationships in all directions at work and feeling more highly valued, respected and trusted. All ingredients of a high performing workplace<sup>43</sup>.

While we do not press for the limit of small group processes to be just 10 (as Ms Bremer does), we agree with her experience and advice that meetings and workshops to shape the culture are best done in smaller workgroups or teams. (I have experienced a group of 35 making significant traction in creating and fine-tuning its culture.)

*Looking to and empowering the workgroup to solve workplace problems is consistent with and supportive of contemporary trends in high performance organisations and the role of the leader*

*“Today’s high performance organisations foster continuous learning for continuous improvements, ... Driven by a rapidly changing global market, organisations are seeking new ways to think, organise, communicate and work. The relationship between workers and managers is shifting. Workers are required to take more responsibility for their work and to have skills in critical thinking and problem solving. Managers need to learn the role of facilitator and change their old patterns of directing. New ways of learning that involve experiential activity offer promise to organisations striving to achieve high performance. ...”<sup>44</sup>*

*What is going on through this approach – illustrated by reference to bullying*

By working on the team climate and/or organisational culture, by nipping any discomforting, unacceptable behaviour in the bud, by talking about it – confronting it – early on, sharing your discomfort at the troubling behaviour with your colleagues and asking for their help to tackle and solve the problem – while at the same time warming the relationship with the source of the troubling behaviour and supporting each other through a shared commitment to learning to work together collaboratively, people can pro-actively stop bullying becoming a problem. We can see no other way of stopping bullying from occurring.

We see all these dynamics as a self-reinforcing, self-sustaining dynamic or system. The culture quickly develops whereby people often bring such experiences up in their workplace conversations and by sharing their experiences on intervening in such dynamics, they thereby help one another grow their awareness of what people can experience as bullying and they support each other in fine-tuning and polishing their interventions.

*What is going on here? – the rationale*

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<sup>42</sup> Etienne Wenger, the social anthropologist and education theorist who is considered the co-originator of the concept of ‘communities of practice’, holds that learning is inherently a social process; that being involved in a social (group) activity is very important to learning. When people are dealing with a real life situation they are compelled to learn. (See also writings of Hung, D.)

<sup>43</sup> Hays J.M., *Building High Performing Teams*

<sup>44</sup> Lankard, Bettina A. New Ways of Learning in the Workplace. ERIC Digest

Self-regulation (by the team) and self-calibration (by individuals) of what colleagues find acceptable and unacceptable in other peoples' behaviours, is going on here. People are modelling and learning how to trust and support one another in talking about uncomfortable things in a way so that a colleague (who is the source of the concern) will not feel attacked. People are learning from each other how to feel, to talk about their feelings, to ask for help (be vulnerable), to listen, to support each other, how to be open trusting and authentic; about compassion and how to find it. They will come to see that improved personal health, reduced stress, more joy from work and relationships, more connectedness and human wholeness, a higher level of individual and team performance comes from being able to speak up early, pro-actively even, about anything that is not OK and sharing the concern with your colleagues.

Developing and practicing voicing and assertiveness-coming-from-compassion is a valuable life skill that virtually guarantees the practitioner will never be bullied.

The strengthened sense of trust, safety, relationship and pride in being a member of a highly engaged, high performing team underpins the team and individual well-being, self-esteem, self-efficacy and professional satisfaction.

People who feel valued, trusted, respected and empowered as adults capable of surfacing and dealing with their own team issues are much more likely to treat each other in a mature, adult way.

At every step, attention is given to the staff being equipped (skilled, practiced, authorised) to sustain and continuously improve the process.

## Attachment B

### Practitioner's Guide 2: Equipping workplace leaders to work sustainably on the culture

The personal challenge facing a manager of or involved in organisational change is to learn to trust, to ask staff (colleagues) for help and to let go or relinquish the control mindset or paradigm, if that still influences their thinking and approach.<sup>45</sup>

What the world of organisational change management knows is:

- Most change initiatives fail. (It is widely agreed among writers in the field that the failure rate is between 50% and 80%.)
- They take a long time and cost 'an arm and a leg'. (Both in terms of \$'s and human pain and suffering)
- They are extremely hard. (Change weariness or exhaustion is a standard concern of most texts on change management.)

Not surprisingly, therefore, new insights, perspectives, understandings, ideas and approaches have emerged from the experience and study of thousands of change projects of all sizes in all sectors; all aimed at maximising the chances of a change initiative being a success. The emergence and convergence of some old and new professions on the challenges of organisational change (OCM) have doubtless contributed to this. (The long standing professional paradigms of project management, human resource management, organisational development (often rooted in 'command and control' thinking) have been joined in understanding and re-inventing OCM by paradigms from the behavioural and neurological sciences and fields such as psychology, psychoanalysis, brain science, human relationships, emotional and social intelligence, human motivation, etc.)

This newly emergent mindset is not intuitive, especially not for those practitioners with the old mindset firmly embedded. It could well be quite a wrench and counter-cultural to many; especially to those whose professional paradigm focusses on mechanical and engineering processes. (Hays suggests the distinction can be represented as a concern for boxes (roles, positions, things) and lines (hard wired connections, linking pipes, wires, flows etc between the boxes) on a whiteboard, on the one hand (the mechanical, engineering lens) contrasted with a focus on what is going on in the white space between the boxes and pipes or wires, which is where human minds, relationships and organisational culture are represented.)

Which means that for a leader or manager to be able to adopt and execute the new approach to OCM, they will need to be able to set aside their logical, rational, orderly mind and expectations about the things and dynamics (levers) that are involved in change and that they will need to deal with to be successful and become effective in dealing with

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<sup>45</sup> This material emerged from email exchanges between the CEO of an organisation that had recently abandoned one of the worlds' largest IT-based change projects, Dr Jay Hays and the author.

peoples' beliefs, values, habits, behaviours, needs, motivation, expectations and relationships.

The successful change manager now needs to appreciate that:

- While the logic underpinning thinking and behaviour makes sense at a surface level, deep flaws in the logic may well remain largely unquestioned.
- Such deep flaws may well reveal themselves in recurring and unanticipated problems, mistakes and failures that have conventionally been perceived as flowing from human resistance, indolence, disinterest, incapability or a lack of other types of resources.
- We often are unaware that we are exhausting ourselves and our resources trying to fix these surface problems when they are really symptoms of deeper issues.
- Often our pre-occupation with trying to deal with these insoluble problems prevents the change manager from seeing and resolving the actual underlying problem.
- We are often trapped in beliefs and expectations that are fundamentally flawed, and our behaviour both perpetuates and is influenced by the flawed system of our own creation.
- Change leaders can only get transformative, sustained change if they surface and work on the fundamental, underlying organisational issues.
- Transformation implies dramatic shifts in the substance of an entity; deep form and structural change, changes in beliefs, values and thinking.
- You cannot solve complex problems with the same thinking that produced them in the first place.
- You may have to first work on changing (growing) yourself and your mindset, before you proceed with any real chance of success.
- Specifically, the leader/manger of change may well need to work for some time on their habits, attitudes, values, behaviours – particularly any that could tend to the leader subjugating the led. To put this another way:
  - The change leader will need to be mindful about ever assuming that –
    - People cannot or will not do the right thing if given freedom
    - He/she knows better; has all the answers or is smarter than others
    - If they keep pressing the point or demanding things that people will come to accept their dictates
    - People just want to be led
    - Decisiveness is more important than reason.
  - Because if the leader does make and act on such assumptions, he/she will be sure to act in ways that disempower and distance others; that cause people to disengage, reluctantly comply, depart. Which will trigger a downward spiral because these reactions (of the perceived 'strong leader') to his/her behaviour will in turn make the leader drive the change in even more self-undermining ways.

The change manager who has a good chance of success appreciates that:

- What people need most is a chance to grow and develop, to have a voice in things that matter, to earn a sense of ownership over their organisational life, to make a difference.



- This will never happen as long as people are marginalised from the real work that needs to be done, including work such as that traditionally regarded as the responsibility of the leader, namely the solving of tough problems and the making of hard decision.
- When people design their future, they are more likely to understand, value and enact it.
- If you (the leader, change manager) give your people a little, they will demand a lot; not a lot of you, but rather a lot of themselves.
- This is what the future of our society and organisations depends on: a dynamic, empowered and capable society.

So what do I need to do to be a successful, effective change manager?

1. Ask yourself regularly, am I at risk of not seeing opportunities - or of refusing - to place the challenge of finding and implementing solutions in the hands of those who must live with them?
2. Do the personal work necessary to grow your self-awareness, self-knowledge and understanding around 1.
3. Place the problem facing the organisation in the hands of employees and entrust and empower them to solve it.
4. Accept that some may not want the responsibility; some may lack skills or confidence. And that is OK; not everybody is ready, willing and able; but they can become so with training and coaching. The whole purpose of this approach to leading and change is to build capacity and goodwill.
5. Be assured that many will step up to the challenge and produce solutions much greater of at least with higher probabilities of success than outsiders, leaders, technical experts or consultants could generate.

## Attachment C

### Practitioner's Guide 3: Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Change Management

In Bremer's approach, workshops (team, small group) conversations are central. The effectiveness of the culture change process will be considerably enhanced if those conversations are informed and shaped by the participants being skilled in Dialogue and Appreciative Inquiry.

Essentially, change occurs through human interaction, conversation and communication<sup>46</sup>. The processes involved in human interaction, conversation and communication are the focus of the fields of Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry and Positive Change Management and through becoming familiar with and practiced in those methodologies, the participants in the change and the effectiveness of the change will be assisted and will benefit considerably.

That is to say, the culture change approach and activities detailed above will be more effective the more participants are aware of and practiced in these concepts – Dialogue, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and Positive Change Management (CM+). Each is a recognised catalyst and approach to change in its own right, so when all 3 are combined or even simply drawn on to inform and shape a culture change project, the more likely it will be that the change is effectively and sustainably done.

*"... combining AI and CM+ can substantially improve the likelihood that organisational change and (organisation) development priorities are achieved. Moreover, integrating the techniques ensures that the change process proceeds more smoothly and with fewer deleterious impacts than is often the case in organisational change initiatives. ... both AI and CM+ in their own ways reduce the risk of failure and counterproductive (impacts). ... Together, they can make a meaningful, positive difference, ..."*<sup>47</sup>

The benefits of embedding AI and CM+ in a culture change project are *"further amplified through Dialogue ..."*.

## Dialogue

The following excerpts from Hays & Cowan-Sahadath provide key understandings about Dialogue.

Dialogue appreciates differences, leads to new and deeper understandings, and can build the consensus, shared commitment, and unified purpose that transformation requires. It is a key mechanism or enabler of the change process, from the dawning realisation that change is needed to the evaluation of the initiative.

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<sup>46</sup> Hays JM & Cowan-Sahadath K, op cit

<sup>47</sup> ibid

Dialogue hinges on shared concern, invokes a spirit of inquiry and curiosity, and depends on openness to new ideas and willingness to shift position and learn from and with others (Jabri, 2003; Gear et al (2003); Schabracq, 2007). Schein (1993) notes that dialogue is at the core of effective group work and a driving force in organisational change. Passfield (2002) emphasises that Dialogue is the primary mechanism in collaboration. Schabracq (2007) notes that the objective of dialogue is to come to "...a new common ground, a new reality" (p. 109). Gear et al (2003) state that:

*...dialogue has become important as an aspect of understanding the difficulties and possibilities of learning and change. ...[It] is seen as a collective way of opening up judgements and assumptions to processes of change (p. 89).*

Hays and Collis explain:

*Dialogue is a means to get teams and organisations "unstuck"—to see the beliefs and practices that inhibit learning, growth, and innovation and to move effectively beyond them.*

*Certainties that seem to hold individuals and collectives in fixed positions can be sufficiently loosened so that new possibilities can come into existence". (Gear)*

Calton and Payne (2003) explain:

*One way this is achieved is by the use of metaphors and paradoxes and the commitment to exploring complex issues to achieve, first and foremost, deeper understanding (rather than a drive to reach quick consensus or decision).*

*Dialogue invites participants to shift their perspectives away from a struggle to decide between either / or dichotomies and toward the encouragement of inclusive both / and approaches to problem identification and response (p. 35)."*

Kellett (1999) observes that "Collaborative learning through dialogue is one approach to creating ongoing, intentional change in organizations" (p. 211). It is the collaborative nature of dialogue that makes it central to learning and change, and particularly significant in the CM+ Roadmap. Kellett (1999) adds:

*Sometimes the objective of dialogue is to create shared visions of the future from the perspective and interests of multiple constituents so that a more inclusive and enduring future might be achieved (p. 211).*

Dialogue is neither casual conversation nor brief exchange; it is not discussion (Levine, 1994). Dialogue is certainly not one-way as in directives, advice, or advocacy. It is not the kind of "conversation" we often have where one person speaks and—while the other has his or her turn—is preparing to speak again, as opposed to giving the other speaker full attention and listening openly and without judgement. The two may as well be talking to themselves or to someone else because there is no meaningful exchange and building toward shared understanding (a requirement of dialogue).

Dialogue is not debate, for its purpose is not to win arguments or prove points. While debate may serve to highlight the merits of oppositional views, it may also entrench positions, which would be antithetical to the ideals of dialogue. Dialogue seeks to get beyond the ordinary and beneath the surface, revealing hidden truths, untested beliefs, flawed myths, and both the beauty and ugliness of reality.

Dialogue does not represent (though may have to acknowledge and contend with) power differentials such as might be the case between supervisor and worker, manager and team, or privileged and disenfranchised. Perceived and real inequalities based on disparities in power will delimit dialogue. Much preparatory work might have to be done to enable real dialogue in such situations. (On the other hand, it may be meaningful dialogue between parties that begins to address real and perceived problems between them.) (Emphasis added.)

The essence of such Dialogue is that its result is a new and shared understanding built on mutual contributions. This means that personal motivations, agenda, and predetermined conclusions are put aside in the interests of coming to that new joint understanding and, potentially, a decision to which all participants commit. Since the process of Dialogue is a sustained one and its potential value so great, improving the process and the working relationships amongst interactants is a reasonable and meaningful aspiration.

Dialogue is about seeing possibilities, opening up when some might shut down. It is a collective and concerted means for overcoming impediments to learning and change.

Dialogue is understood first and foremost to be the co-creation of meaning. This implies that a solution, decision, or other conclusion is arrived at through a group process (dialogue) with which no individual contributor began. This is not to say that groups do not start out with a goal in mind (say, to improve organisational well-being), but that no particular agenda is pushed. By agenda, here, is meant specific, (predetermined and potentially exclusive or narrow) ways and means of achieving the desired outcome.

The following quote (Isaacs, 1993) is suggestive of the relationship between Dialogue and Appreciative Inquiry—they both attempt to get people to think together in new and different ways, “to develop collaborative thought and coordinated action (p. 24):

Dialogue is an attempt to perceive the world with new eyes, not merely to solve problems using the thought that created them in the first place (p. 30) ...the same thinking that created our most pressing problems cannot be used to solve them. Unless we find ways of transforming the ground out of which our thinking and acting emerges, we are likely to repeat the kinds of continued errors and produce the unintended effects we now witness (p. 39).

## Appreciative Inquiry (AI)

Appreciative Inquiry depends on and is a form of Dialogue. AI is a particular approach to dialogue that asks and focusses on 'what's right?' rather than on 'what's wrong?'. By reframing the focus and questions, it reframes the thinking and conversations that follow.

AI fits neatly on the foundation or approach to culture change described above because the preconditions for its effective use – such as having high levels of participation; facing the challenge of integrating and leveraging changes (new behaviours); an organic, emergent, improvisational approach (the opposite of a project management approach!)<sup>48</sup> – are

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<sup>48</sup> Summed up by this quote: 'Appreciative Inquiry is a bottom-up, high stakeholder involvement, and organic approach to positive change; not a mechanistic or managerial approach foisted upon people.'

precisely what characterise (are the very essence or nature of) the approach to culture change that we advocate.

AI has been described as being a :

*... collaborative search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. It involves systematic discovery of what drives the organization when it is most effective and capable. AI involves the art and practice of asking questions that strengthen a system's capacity to heighten positive potential. In AI, intervention gives way to imagination and innovation, instead of negation, criticism. Linking this 'positive change core' directly to any change agenda results in the realization of changes never thought possible through democratic and collaborative effort (p. 79).*

and

*... transformational organization change process. People experiencing an AI inspire each other to leverage their most powerful collective stories in order to dream and design a new affirmative future. In the process of truly hearing each other's hopes and dreams, people create community—they discover affinity, build relationships, and develop common language with those who were previously only colleagues in the most formal sense. AI at its best generates an energy that causes people to change rapidly and positively in relation to each other and in doing so their organizations and communities are transformed to the extent that they are never again the same (p. 5).<sup>49</sup>*

It has been found<sup>50</sup> that teams employing AI develop solutions that are more novel and practical than teams using (another) approach, had more confidence in the efficacy of their proposed solutions, and reported higher levels of team identification and potency. These findings spotlight the value of AI's contribution to innovation and change.

## Positive change management (PCM)

Brings into focus and helps us to understand the internal human and relationship dynamics that we envisage occurring through our small group approach to culture change.

The essence of the PCM approach is that it builds capabilities that drive and sustain change:

- Employees will understand, embrace, and be equipped to make the most of the change.
- Furthermore, having been involved meaningfully in the change throughout the process, staff and other stakeholders will have acquired critical knowledge and deepened skills that will help them undertake future changes or solve other problems that might arise.
- In short, they will have developed in positive ways.<sup>51</sup>

It generates a range of attributes that operate in individuals and organisations to enhance quality of life and performance. These include hope, optimism, trust, and resilience

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<sup>49</sup> Ricketts and Willis (2001)

<sup>50</sup> Peelle (2006)

<sup>51</sup> Hays & Cowan-Sahadath

(Schabracq, 2007; Snyder & Lopez, 2002). Joy, vitality, passion, nourishment, inspiration, love, and compassion are also indicative of positive spirit. In no way will there be a net loss in morale, goodwill, working relationships, or operating effectiveness.

*'The transition from negativity to optimism and positive emotions has been found to contribute to motivation, social helpfulness, effective leadership, productive relationships, creativity, resilience, problem solving, improved decision making, learning, and facilitating change (p.31).'<sup>52</sup>*

*'In a state of enthusiasm, our horizon of possible actions is widened.... Fear narrows the space of what is possible.... Emotional spaces not only contain the actions that are possible, they also modulate the way in which we carry out those actions (p. 745).'<sup>53</sup>*

## The CM+ Roadmap

Hay's CM+ (Change Management Plus) Roadmap<sup>54</sup>, a positive approach and framework for organisational change, is congruent with Bremer's approach to organisational culture change. It is a high stakeholder involvement approach to change.

For example,

- It is a team-based approach to change.
- The high-stakeholder involvement throughout the change process approach reduces barriers to change, including so-called resistance to change, and increases the likelihood of successful, sustainable, and repeatable change.
- It is a key capability-builder.

Hays' *Reality Check* phase covers acquiring real data and confronting organisational members with it is aligned with Bremer's .... [gathering of data on behaviours]. Hays' Roadmap interestingly goes even further and advocates that where possible, staff should be involved in designing and administering the data gathering process and tools, and in interpreting data obtained and presenting results.

The following synopsis of Hays' and Cowan-Sahadath's<sup>55</sup> paper on positive change management highlights the importance of involving staff throughout the change process and the organic, emergent thinking about organisational change:

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<sup>52</sup> McClellan (2007)

<sup>53</sup> Echeverría

<sup>54</sup> Hays has also developed a changer management scorecard for evaluating and learning from an on-going or completed change program. It provides further guidance for the design and implementation of large-scale organisational change.

<sup>55</sup> Hays & Cowen-Sahadath, op cit

## Attachment D

### Practitioner's Guide 4: Why participatory, group processes are effective

Through participating in such group processes\* peoples' emotional and social intelligence competencies are strengthened – they become more emotionally mature – and they learn to:

- listen to understand
- engage through deep discovery and exploration
- connect with others and trust them
- surface root causes
- convey a sense and model to others that they can be trusted (by being seen as authentic and committed to truth telling and learning)
- feel and articulate their feelings about what they are experiencing (to speak up)
- feel safe to take risks and create a culture so that others will also feel safe to do the same
- find compassion for themselves and others – to let things go when appropriate
- be tolerant; recognise their baggage and make allowances for it
- say what they need to say without making others feel discounted or attacked
- be open, transparent, vulnerable, authentic
- know the difference between political behaviour and authentic behaviour
- have fun
- bring their feelings, emotions, beliefs to work
- take risks in sharing appropriately some of the inner-self – their essence or soul – which is the basis for humans coming into authentic contact and building a relationship.

#### ***Why does all this happen through participation in group processes?***

Through group processes (dialogue, collaborative, appreciative enquiry or empowering conversation, etc) people can:

- make sense of things (make meaning) through the social processes involved in dialogue with others
- get connected, and connected human potential is boundless
- get a sense of peoples' boundaries, assumptions, needs, expectations, sensitivities, baggage. They see more data in the picture and see that data (considerations) with greater clarity
- get (what McGuire and Rhodes term) "bigger minds" – the human potential in the organisation is enhanced. (Explained more fully below.) People learn to obtain, access, be aware of, hold, work with more and more complex considerations and so they develop more mental depth, breadth and ability to handle the added challenge and complexity
- get the opportunity to do what human nature needs to do, they drive and thrive towards the next level, the next potential, the next fulfilment
- become more conscious of their interdependence; more connected and sharing. The culture becomes more collaborative
- learn the power of telling the truth; find deeper wisdom from understanding the way things really are; accept accountability for sustaining the whole organisation
- learn to understand and deal with more complex situations and this stretches their capacity to comprehend, collaborate and deal with the added complexity

- grow and transform their mindsets from one level to the next. Such growth is different from skilling people in leadership or other managerial or professional competencies
- work on themselves, start to change themselves and in doing so, they are effectively and concurrently working on leadership; which in turn directly shapes their team and organisational culture.

Individuals become engaged, enthusiastic, empowered, trusting, connected, stimulated, committed, personally and professionally rewarded through their participation in dialogue and group processes.

In a nutshell, group processes provide the opportunities for what humans are programmed to seek, namely, advancement, adaptation and development toward increasingly complex knowledge, mastery and harmony in their environment. What is happening in group processes is that people are learning to have – and getting better at having – 'genuine and creative multilateral, multi-level connections with others'.

Argyris' psychological insight is that dialogue is effective because it creates the space and gives us the skills and practice where we can do the work that he suggests is essential to do, namely, to surface, see and confront defensive routines; to have all the conversations we need to have.



**Attachment E****Practitioner's Guide 5: Illustrating bottom up culture change:  
Creating a culture of engagement****Engaging and leading staff in creating the workplace culture (climate) you want*****Foundation understanding***

For people to be meaningfully engaged in creating and sustaining the desired workplace culture, they need to be connected with at an emotional level, in a positive, on-going way.

Or to put it another way, connecting with and engaging\* people in any aspect of life is most powerful (effective, sustainable) if the connection is made with and through their emotions. (\*By 'engaging', I mean tapping into their energy, triggering their interest and participation, and their sense of shared ownership.

It follows logically that for people to be genuine participants in and owners of the work of creating, shaping and sustaining their workplace culture, they must have opportunities to connect meaningfully with colleagues and visit, surface, explore, discuss, understand and embrace what is going on for them at the level of their emotions.

Meaningful interpersonal or group conversations where it is known (proven, witnessed) that it is safe to talk openly about emotions are therefore fundamental to culture shaping, refining and embedding. You cannot mandate effectively – direct from above - how people must behave. For them to embrace and live the desired behaviours they need to be involved emotionally at every step in the formation and maintenance of that desired culture – of the desired behaviours.

**Some alternative approaches to engaging people at an emotional level****(i) *Create a climate (culture) of safety and engagement, where emotional work can be done***

To feel safe and engaged, people need to experience, feel and know:

- Their workgroup is conducive to and supportive of open honest conversations.
- It is psychologically, emotionally safe to speak up (whilst being both open and respectful) about anything work-related that concerns them or that they have an opinion on, without being fearful that in doing so they might put at risk;
  - their acceptance by and respect of their peers and bosses
  - their career prospects, employment or anything else they hold dear.
    - This requires that they have good reason to be confident that bad news, honest views, constructive criticism, efforts to contribute their talents and new ideas will not be punished.
- They and their contributions are valued; that they are welcome to make any contributions they can towards – and to join in being responsible for – improving or

fixing things. People get self-respect from feeling they are earning and receiving the respect of others.

- It is worthwhile – not a waste of time and effort – to try to make a difference by speaking up, giving honest feedback, being committed to and involved in making an improvement.
- They will be genuinely heard and that the odds are they will be able to make a difference.

The reason why people need to have an environment like this to feel engaged (or, indeed, to work on any other element of the organisation's culture) is that before we allow ourselves to engage and our emotional selves to be brought into play\*, we need to feel safe that we can trust our workgroup colleagues to listen to and support us – that is to say, to not ridicule or hurt us in any way - if we expose our emotions to them. \*Such as by expressing and sharing our feelings, concerns, uncertainties, joys, puzzlement or anxieties or by us being vulnerable and asking for help, understanding, support.

### *The reality*

Workgroups do not automatically or necessarily have such a climate. That can often require using a disciplined methodology, some skill development – including perhaps social intelligence skills such as courage, humility, compassion, empathy, vulnerability – and sometimes coaching in how to listen to understand and not to rush to judgements, to listen to feedback constructively and not to feel attacked and needing to go on the defensive and in how to create and embed that desired climate (culture).

Some people are blessed with the talent, capabilities and/or experience required to create and sustain such a climate.

For those of us not yet so blessed, the approach recommended involves:

**Step 1:** At its next team meeting invite your workgroup to talk about where the members feel the group stands in terms of the dot points above. Everyone needs to be heard. (Bear in mind that people who tend to be reluctant to talk in a group are more likely to speak up if they have already, today, in this space of the team meeting, had an opportunity to speak up on something they are comfortable about and have effectively heard their own voice in this group. )

Through this group discussion, identify some actions for improving things and share the responsibilities for implementing them widely.

**Step 2:** Discuss everyone's experiences of workgroups where they have previously felt safe and engaged. From this – drawing on the stories of peoples' experiences - develop a charter or vision for how your workgroup wants to work together to re-create the best of the members' workplace experiences.

*'Take a few minutes to think about an enjoyable experience you have had working in a high performing team, where you felt most engaged, challenged satisfied, alive and enjoyment of your work life.*

*Describe this experience to a colleague and then the group. What made it such a positive experience? What do you think was going on that shaped this experience?*

**Step 3:** At every team meeting, the workgroup is encouraged and facilitated to use the elements in this charter as a hook, an opening or authorisation to raise any matter a member wants to talk about. It might be to endorse and recognise someone's behaviour that modelled the group's charter of what they want life to be like in their team or it could be a concern, a discomfort or a query.

This is how the group self-calibrates and constantly aligns its members' behaviours with the group's expectations.

**Step 4:** The group routinely – it is in its charter, so every member has an obligation to ensure it happens – sets aside sufficient time at its regular team meetings to air, discuss and reflect on how the group is working, having regard to the team's charter, the shared vision and everyone's expectations.

This conversation should be recognised as being separate from the problem-solving, operations or task-focussed conversation about the work of the team.

The group can of course at any point decide to amend their charter to reflect new thinking, experience, new members' opinions, etc and to achieve a more effective, more engaging, high performing, collaborative, innovative team environment and group processes.

**Step 5:** In this space where the team is reflecting and working on how it is working together and what it could do to improve things in that respect, the leader – bear in mind that for many their favourite definition of 'leadership', is *'the creation of spaces where people can give of their best and do their best work'* - encourages group members to;

- bring up issues of concern, openly and honestly
- listen deeply to each other
- suspend judgement and engage in dialogue
- refrain from rushing in with solutions, so that people can be allowed to work through their issues at an emotional level
- create an increasingly safe setting where team members can share their issues, concerns, etc with confidence that they will be listened to in complete safety, with respect, compassion and empathy.

What is going on here is that people are modelling, practicing and learning from each other the skills required to create the trust and safety where connections with people's emotions can happen and engagement can grow. Where the desired culture can be embedded, flourish, be refined and sustained.

**Step 6:** The leader may also see benefit in encouraging members to take turns in introducing or leading some discussion on some workplace or workgroup topic of interest and of their own choosing. This helps to nurture confidence in individuals in speaking up in the group space.

**(ii) *Adopt best practice leadership behaviours to engage with people emotionally at the level of the individual***

You can do this by delegating more and engaging with each individual to;

- show a personal interest in them; that you genuinely care about them, their challenges, their career development, their ideas, what is important to them

- drop by regularly to check on how they are going on these fronts
- encourage, focus, challenge and channel their energies, professional growth and ambitions
- foster an atmosphere of dynamism, of ambition, of aiming to be the best
- help them to continuously nurture their ambition to improve, grow, develop themselves.

Understand that time spent dealing with your staff is a very high value activity, if done well.

It involves;

- Coaching people – which is not about telling them how to do things – to find meaning in their work and to solve their problems themselves'. It is about asking them for their ideas and encouraging them to think through the options and try their preferred solution. To report back on how things went and on what lessons they learned.
- Supporting them to keep their priorities aligned with the wider group's priorities.
- Coaching them to set stretch goals for themselves and review progress to gain fresh insights into their strengths and challenges.
- Acknowledging their accomplishments and celebrate their successes.

Appreciate that you will be hitting emotional buttons every time you challenge, energise, excite or enthuse someone; make them feel trusted, professional, valued, respected, rewarded. Also that if you aren't hitting such emotional buttons with your staff, you probably aren't engaging them and getting the best out of them.

### **(iii) Story-telling**

As part of your efforts to create and sustain a safe workplace environment where people feel they can trust each other sufficiently to talk openly, without any fear of consequences, invite them to share their stories with a colleague, a part of or the whole group, such as follows:

- 1) Tell a story about how, when and where your professional talents have been challenged, stretched and well utilised.
- 2) Tell us about something that puzzles you at or about your work.

Invite people to explore their responses to the stories they heard. What did the story or stories bring up for them? What are some possibilities for moving forwards on the things that hooked them in the stories they heard of in their own story?

Story-telling usually involves taking some risk so it tests and proves up the trust and confirms publicly the courage in the group. It surfaces emotions, facilitating connectedness between participants and engagement in their shared concerns, intent and purpose.

## Attachment F

## Practitioner's Guide 6: Principles of Organisational Change Management

**Principle 1. When staff are fundamentally engaged with change, they understand it, adopt it, feel emotionally attached – pride, ownership and commitment - to it; embody and live it.**

- Successful and enduring change hinges on stakeholder buy-in and adoption.
- This is achieved through collaborative engagement of stakeholders throughout the change project in safe, trust-based small groups.
- For this to be a reality, the stakeholders will need to be made to feel valued, respected, heard and rewarded.
- The leadership's or management's role is to entrust, empower and enable staff to participate fully so they can build this level of engagement and ownership.
- Recognise that top-down change – driven and imposed from above – cannot be a success.
- Additional benefits are that various barriers and blockers to change – such as resistance – will be avoided or reduced.

**Principle 2. We recognise the importance of building the capabilities and empowerment of our staff to pro-actively initiate and collaboratively shape, build, embed change and improvement activities.**

- Through their genuine involvement in change activities, our staff will develop, practice, deepen and continuously improve their skills and confidence in undertaking change activities and solve problems they identify.
- Every change activity represents opportunities for our staff to learn, develop, grow. We will look out for such opportunities and harness them towards this end.
- We will need to assess and in some situations enhance the emotional and social intelligence skills of our people to ensure the climate encourages and rewards authentic, open, compassionate, collaborative, straight conversations, behaviours and relationships.
- Regular conversations between the stakeholders in small groups based on these values, behaviours, skills and relationships will
  - allow people to explore, assess, test, reflect and understand what the change potentially means for them – for their sense of competence and mastery of their work; their sense of being able to continue to feel capable and professional;
  - give people opportunities to go through their own endings and transitions associated with the change, in their way and in their own time (when they need to);

- enable people to surface and talk about the change, especially about their own feelings, concerns, issues. (So that no-one feels like they are a hapless victim of the change on whom it has been foisted. Rather everyone potentially is enabled and supported to become a champion of the change.

**Principle 3. We recognise that while sound project management processes are valuable, we need to be mindful that organisational change is not a purely mechanical process.**

- In managing change, we recognise we need to attend to, work closely and effectively with human emotions – anxieties, fears, threats, hopes, needs, relationships, transitions, closure.
- We need to attend to not just where we want to get to, what we want to build and deliver but also and especially, HOW we want to get there (our processes).
- The solution will lie in the process.
- It has been found wise not to give a name to a change project. A change initiative should be seen as a current focus of regular ('*business as usual*') continuous improvement efforts, for which everyone has responsibility for embracing.

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## Attachment I

### About the author

Graham Gourlay holds Masters degrees in both Public Administration (Public Sector Management) and Business (Organisational Change & Consulting), specialising in improving the quality of organisational life for humans; in how to empower and engage them to create and change organisational culture and organisations so that everyone - and the organisation itself - is giving of their best and is high performing.

He has a Graduate Certificate in Research and recently completed a research project across 8 workplaces that robustly demonstrated the effectiveness of his approach to organisational and culture change.

Has worked in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors, holding office as the chief management or operational executive of agencies and whole-of-government functions (including at SES Band 2), Chief of Staff on political leaders and as the GM, Business Development for an international software development company.

Many years' experience as an organisation consultant, leader of organisational renewal and change programs (particularly involving culture change; developing new, more professional capabilities, strengthening engagement and performance) and in coaching executives, staff and teams at all levels. He was invited to brief the Ministers in an incoming national government on his insights into organisational and culture change.

Being a member of the International Coach Federation, Graham practiced a wide range of coaching modalities including workplace, team, relationship, life, behavioural and executive coaching. He coached staff at all levels in a number of Commonwealth Government departments, including executives of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Australian Taxation Office.

A Director and member of the Boards of Management of a number of expanding community health services.

As Harassment Contact Officer in one of the larger Commonwealth agencies and as a coach in various departments and in his own coaching and organisation consulting practice (*Run to Work Pty Ltd*), Graham has had close interaction with, advised and supported hundreds of staff who have experienced bullying. He has also consulted with people accused of being bullies to understand all the dynamics in play and develop preventative strategies and solutions to workplace bullying for individuals, work groups, organisations and national employment policy.

For over a decade, he has drawn on training in psychodynamics and authentic behaviours to;

- (i) understand what is going on for all parties, particularly at the level of internal psychodynamic processes and the way the organisation's culture shapes and influences those processes, individual and corporate performance and effectiveness
- (ii) support people experiencing bullying. Has had considerable opportunities to gain insights into the causes of bullying and how it can be reduced and eliminated. Believes with a properly resourced, multi-pronged strategy that bullying can be eliminated from the workplace – at any level, nationally, at the level of the organisation or at the workgroup or team level. Graham has validated the effectiveness of this strategy for individuals and in large and small workgroups.

## ***Debrief***

### **Research project: Exploring the use of positively-framed, reflective conversation to shape the desired workplace culture/climate**

#### **[A] Introduction to the research project – its rationale - design**

##### ***What is this all about? Why is this research being done?***

###### *Background & context*

Practitioners and scholars in leadership, management and organisational circles are becoming increasingly aware that a workplace culture (or workgroup climate), having certain characteristics, needs to be created and sustained that is conducive to the organisation's goals being met, while human well-being is nurtured.

It is widely recognised that if you want your organisation or workgroup to be innovative, for example, you need to create and nurture a climate/culture that encourages, supports and rewards innovation. People need to feel – indeed, to know for certain – that it is safe for them to take a risk, to try things and to have their trials fail. Similarly, if you want to prevent bullying and other negative behaviours in your workplace – which regulatory agencies around the world are increasingly demanding of employers - you will need to create a climate/culture that prevents such behaviour. The same applies if you want 'teamwork-behaviour'; 'values-based behaviour', collaborative behaviour' or 'respectful behaviour' and even 'high performance', by way of further examples. Having the appropriately conducive climate is crucial to achieving the desired and required organisational ends.

What has been lacking, however, is an evidence-base – some science, if you like – that can guide organisations and managers in how to create and sustain the climate/culture they want. How can we shape the climate or culture of a group, of a team or an organisation – systematically, routinely, ourselves (using mainly in-house resources; reasonably cheaply, in other words) – and maintain that shape when we get it? The research project addresses this question.

###### *The research intervention*

The proposed research project uses an empowering, experiential and learning-oriented intervention at the level of the workgroup, that (potentially) shapes individual, as well as workgroup and organisation-wide capabilities, relationships and behaviours - i.e. the climate/culture.

The intervention is predicated on the recognition – widespread in the organisational change profession - that issuing edicts top down and then trying to enforce compliance with those edicts to elicit the desired behaviours is ineffective. (Humans need to feel a sense of ownership both of any change that they are being expected to pursue or adopt and of its

implementation, achievement and, in due course, its up-dating.) The intervention builds such ownership of the climate/culture in the participating individuals and their workgroup.

The intervention aims to facilitate, empower and enable the group to create the positive workplace climate or culture it desires; to sustain that climate/culture (the sense of ownership and empowerment are key here) so that the group's and the individuals' goals are met and continue to be met, efficiently, effectively and with high regard to human needs and well-being. The research will measure the effectiveness of the intervention in achieving that outcome.

This proposed research intervention adopts a number of research design elements that have been neglected in the past, but that have been called for more recently by several researchers, particularly by Beirne and Hunter (2013) and other thought leaders in organisational change – namely,

- it intervenes at the workgroup or team level
- it involves empowerment to build in the participants a sense of ownership of and commitment to the change and the desired climate/culture
- it attends to managerial politics and the potential for compromise, slippage and inaction, and
- it is researching a process and looking in detail at the 'working out of ... programmes' and takes a 'more contingent, less determinant' approach to tackling any non-compliant behaviour that is incompatible with the agreed, desired behaviours.

The research project is specifically and centrally concerned with exploring and testing the effectiveness of workgroups engaging in regular, reflective conversations, framed by the behavioural expectations, articulated and agreed on by the group, of the key positive elements of its desired climate/culture, to;

- (i) make that climate/culture a reality, while also
- (ii) maintaining the desired climate/culture and
- (iii) constantly monitoring and, as necessary, refreshing the vision for the desired climate/culture to keep it aligned with changing business realities.

The thinking being tested in the research therefore is: If a workgroup has regular opportunities to practice, to acquire (through dialogical, experiential learning), to develop, fine-tune and apply their capabilities to reflect on and safely talk about any concerns about their agreed expectations being not met, will the group be effective in shaping and improving the climate/culture, well-being and performance of the group?

***Where does the idea come from? Why explore this group- and empowerment-based, positively-framed, reflective conversation approach to climate/culture-shaping?***

The approach involves the workgroup first articulating and agreeing on the climate/culture that it wants to have and then self-regulating its enactment through regular, honest, respectful dialogue in a safe container (meeting).

The development of and confidence to test this approach emerged from:

- The researcher's experience of the potential for transformational growth and improvements in health, well-being and performance in individuals and in groups from engaging in psychodynamic group processes - such as reflection, dialogue, authentic behaviours, straight talk and the enhancement of emotional intelligence – through many years of postgraduate study and practice as an organisational consultant and executive and team coach.
- A large US agency faced a major problem of 'negative acts' – bullying behaviour. It applied considerable resources to support its staff, in their workgroups, to address the problem. It was a corporate goal to reduce and eliminate bullying. The associated empowerment of the staff and the building up of both a sense of ownership of the problem and of the solutions proved highly effective. Reflecting on what was the key to the success of this large-scale, resource-intensive, action research project, participants and researchers jointly concluded that it was the nature of the conversations held in the empowered groups that made all the difference and achieved the positive results.
- There is practitioner experience locally that is aligned with that US outcome. The experience here is that when workgroups have agreed, in a positive mindset, on their behavioural expectations of each other – i.e. of the climate elements they want to experience – and they have regular opportunities to, are empowered to and equipped (skilled, coached, practiced) to monitor and self-regulate the maintenance of that climate, they have higher levels of collaboration, performance and well-being.
- There is also considerable theoretical underpinning of these experiences and this approach to climate/culture-shaping. It is outlined in Attachment A.

The conversation-based, empowered group process that is the vehicle for the climate/culture-shaping work undertaken through the intervention facilitates, develops and encourages collaborative behaviours. Collaboration is the key to high performance in groups and particularly, to innovation and the prevention of negative behaviours. (If people are collaborating, they cannot be bullying each other.) It also has a significant and positive impact on well-being. So the approach being explored potentially has widespread importance for driving innovation, for preventing bullying and for achieving high levels of team performance. These are central concerns of governments and employers everywhere.

After reflecting on the 5 chapters about positive organisational climates and culture contained's 2011 edition of *The Handbook of Organizational Culture and Climate*, Wilderom concluded - 'new research needs to focus on the pertinent question: How do collective work entities develop a set of shared norms, values, assumptions, expectations, and so forth that emphasize and model (more) positive ways of working.' This is surely, as direct and as explicit a call by thought-leaders for this particular research project that one could imagine!

***Some other key facets of this approach to climate/culture-shaping that are being explored?***

*The importance of having a safe space and (of using it) to speak up*

It has been found in various organisational settings and is supported by theoretical work, that it is possible to create and sustain the climate/culture that is desired, if a safe, collaborative work environment is created and maintained.

In such a setting, participants feel safe to speak up about any concerns they might have, at any time, such as about the way they are experiencing the culture/climate, individual or group behaviours, etc. They have learned, through experience in this setting, to trust their colleagues and they know they will be listened to respectfully, heard and supported by others in the workgroup when their concerns are brought to the attention of the workgroup and will be respectfully, compassionately addressed by the group.

The psychologically safe workgroup where members can have all of the conversations that they need to have and which the research intervention aims to create, operates like an empowered, self-regulating mechanism to enable group members to collaborate in maintaining the desired culture

*More conversation – speaking up - is healthy*

A fundamental precept of healthy, collaborative, human relationships is the desirability of *‘having all the conversations one needs to have’*. (Scholars of organisational culture may have heard the corollary – that *‘the culture of an organisation is the sum of all of the conversations that people needed to have, but did not have!’*)

The approach in the research intervention is aligned with these precepts as it enables, facilitates and encourages more conversation among the workgroup members bearing on the achievement, nurturing and sustaining of the desired culture/climate and also on the group’s work or performance. (The group is conscious it is responsible for these things – it’s culture and it’s performance.)

There is, moreover, a double loop learning dynamic and/or parallel process at work which reinforces the power of that mechanism in creating and maintaining the desired culture/climate. As the workgroup improves at its ‘group process’, it becomes more trusting and collaborative. Trust and collaboration are the essence of innovation, entrepreneurship and high performing groups. (Moreover, as collaboration is the opposite of aggression, the collaboration chokes out aggression and negative acts associated with it.<sup>1</sup>)

## **[B] Results of the initial round of case studies**

### ***The research project***

This research project was undertaken with private sector sponsorship and support through 2017. (It was originally designed to be an ‘Industry Partnership’ between the private sector and UTAS, but UTAS was unable to continue to provide the supervisory resources required.)

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<sup>1</sup> *‘We came to see that the creation and maintenance of collaborative social space improved our interpersonal behaviour. In particular, it changed the very nature and quality of the conversations that we were having within and between the teams. We suddenly (if belatedly) realized that aggression and collaboration are antithetical concepts (Yorks et al. 2007, pp. 362-365).’*

The management of 8 disparate workgroups across Tasmania agreed to support the project which involved an intervention where a positive framework was created in which each group could hold regular reflective conversations for 20-30 minute on 6 occasions over 3 months.

Changes in the workgroup climate were measured by a survey conducted both before and after the intervention. The survey measured 5 mediating variables (team psychological safety, workgroup emotional intelligence, voice climate, perceived team support, collaborative climate) and 6 outcome variables (work engagement/well-being, team incivility climate, levels of workplace incivility and of negative acts and work performance (for which 2 measures were used)).

### **Results**

- The data from the two surveys suggests that whatever happened in the workgroups between the surveys – i.e. while the intervention (the reflective conversations) was taking place – appears, overall, to be associated with significant change and improvements in the workgroup climate.
- Specifically, 77% (68 of the total of 88) of the workplace climate measures improved between the surveys across the 8 workgroups. Increases in measures of the order of 15% - 20% over the 3 months were not unusual.
- Although there was a net positive result across all 11 variables in every one of the 8 groups, the extent of the improvement or positive climate change varied considerably between the groups. For example, while two groups saw improvement in all 11 variables and amassed a total change (improvement) of 139% and 98% respectively over the 11 variables – an average improvement per variable of 12.6% and 8.9% - another group, on the other hand, totalled a net change of 1.2% for the 11 variables, making the average (net) change per variable for that group just 0.13%.
- For the 8 groups, the average of the total (net) improvements (positive change overall) across all 11 variables was 58%.
- Only 9 (of the 88) measures deteriorated across 6 of the groups. However, two groups encountered significant and distracting challenges in their organisation during the intervention and experienced deterioration in 11 measures between them. (Separate research posits that negative dynamics override positive dynamics.) It is possible that the intervention may well have served to ameliorate the extent of the impact of whatever negative dynamics were triggered by the challenges that these two groups encountered.
- For the improvements to be maintained, the practice of having some reflective conversation regularly, needs to be continued.

## ***Conclusion***

This project points to the potential effectiveness of positively-framed, reflective group conversations in shaping and sustaining desired, agreed workplace climates and cultures.

*Cost of this approach:* Apart from the opportunity cost (in terms of workers' absence from their front-line work while attending a meeting) of a workgroup having such a conversation regularly – say, for 20-30 minutes once a week or a fortnight – and any initial short-term consultancy required to set up the framing and conduct of the reflective conversations (i.e. helping the group to identify, own and discuss compliance with their agreed behavioural expectations), the process can be delivered *in-house* by an interested volunteer group member. It is therefore considered to be a very low-cost, (largely) self-help and self-sustaining approach to workplace climate/culture-shaping.

Graham Gourlay  
*April 2020*

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## **Theoretical underpinnings & values of the conversation-based approach to workplace climate/culture-shaping**

### ***[A] Theoretical basis***

What is the theoretical basis for this intervention project's approach to climate- and culture-shaping?

The climate/culture-shaping intervention outlined here is grounded in theory and professional practice from the fields of action research, authentic leadership, process consulting, behavioural and workplace coaching, culture change, group process facilitation, high performance teams, organisational development; social, experiential and emotional learning; change and learning, psychology (particularly positive psychology and psychodynamics/social analysis) and draws on a raft of specific theories and concepts including bounded emotionality, dialogue, emotional intelligence, experiential skilling and capability development, group processes, negotiating emotional boundaries, Positive Organisational Behaviour (POB), Positive Organisational Scholarship (POS), organisational learning, perceived organisational/colleague/group /supervisor support, Psychological Safety Climate, straight talk, teamwork behaviours, voice, reflective conversation and trust.

### *Transformative cooperation*

Many of the above fields, topics and concepts drawn on in shaping this intervention are encompassed by the concept of '*Transformative cooperation*'. This concept was introduced by Sekerka and Fredrickson (2008) to describe a type of deep change that stems from a positive and authentic psychological perspective and effectively involves the use of positive emotions to achieve dynamic organisational change. The intervention can, I believe, be considered to be grounded in the concept and theory of transformative cooperation.

Transformative cooperation involves seeding a positive emotional climate to drive empowered cultural and organisational change. It is based on the 'broaden-and-build theory' of positive emotions (Fredrickson 1998, 2001, 2009) which relates to the process whereby positive emotional climates support deep change within individuals, organisations and communities. It works at all levels, helping to foster healthy relationships.

Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka and Fredrickson (2011) explain the deeper dynamics involved in transformative cooperation as involving the fostering of positive emotions in a group using some form of strength-based (positive) inquiry to create a positive emotional climate, which, in turn, incubates and makes manifest the benefits of broaden-and-build effects of positive emotions.

This aligns with thinking, dominant in the field of organisational change management, which recognises the importance of creating and nurturing a positive atmosphere for fostering change. The rationale for this, it is argued, is that in positive environments, peoples' emotions and cognitions will be aligned and when people feel good about what they are doing, they are more likely to cooperate and engage in action – which is a precursor for buy-in or building a sense of ownership of a change.

*The solution is to be found in the process!*

The research intervention we are considering here is, therefore, grounded in and reflective of the same theoretical constructs and dynamics as transformative cooperation and change management.

Both paradigms embrace the idea that whatever the objective or intent of the change might be, the solution lies not in – and should not be about - correcting problems, but rather, is better found in ‘a deliberate and continuous effort of originality towards the creation of new forms of organising that provide shared value and mutual benefits for all involved’. The solution – the delivery of a change or a changed climate/culture - is to be found in the process, is the thinking.

*Exclusively top-down approaches or solutions are not effective*

Because it is generative, transformative cooperation – indeed, like any organisational or culture change - cannot be declared, ordered, or implemented via top-down mandate. Transformative cooperation – again, like all change, including organisational culture change - should be a cooperative effort, with contributions coming from - and ownership emerging from - both bottom-up and top-down directions.

*Positive emotions (psychology) are key*

- Vacharkulksemsuk, Sekerka and Fredrickson (2011) suggest that positive emotions stem from transformative cooperation in the workplace and they then broaden-and-build organisational identification and relational strength, thereby expanding individuals and, eventually, the entire organisation. In this way and in essence, transformative cooperation creates a virtuous cycle of positive psychology that nurtures deep change.
- The challenge of learning to create and leverage a climate of positivity is important in both the research and the interventions in this area. Positive work environments, Hartel and Ashkanasy argue [in Ashkanasy, Wilderom and Peterson (2000, p. 88)] have ‘*an emotional climate that provides the emotional experiences necessary for human flourishing.*’
- Edgar Schein pinpointed the need for researchers, particularly those involved in ‘*industrial-organizational (I-O) psychology*’ (Kimmel 2009, p. 170) (as we are here), to be so immersed in group dynamics that they are able to work with behaviours; ‘*the growing concern with positive psychology and positive climates and cultures only begins to make sense if we can specify just what kind of behaviour we are looking for that can be defined as ‘positive’.*’
- Wilderom recognises that: ‘*... new, viable directions and higher productivity levels could be unleashed by pushing more explicitly for positively cultured work settings.*’
- Moreover, it has been reported that positive work environments ‘*are fundamental to organisational members’ ability to perform to their full potential*’ (McKeown, Bryant & Raeder 2009).

## *Teamwork behaviours*

The intervention is facilitating and supporting collaborative or teamwork behaviours and interactions that are described and explained by Sheng, Tian and Chen (2010) in the following terms:

*'... According to the findings of several researchers, teamwork can lead to better performance for organizations, such as the enhancement of productivity in the workplace, improvement of service quality, greater satisfaction of employees with jobs, less absence, and reduced turnover rate. ... Marks et al. (2001) found that the success of teams in accomplishing their goals is related not only to the members' talents and their effective resources, but is also associated with their interactions, as team interactions are based on cognition, language, and the members' interdependency. The input is transformed into output in order to fulfill the goals of the teams. In addition, team interactions include the members' behavior, cognition, and affection (Ilgen, Hollenbeck, Johnson, & Jundt, 2005). According to Rousseau, Aubé, and Savoie (2006), an individual's inner cognition (inclinations and shared mental model) and feelings (sense of belonging) would certainly be transformed into the behaviors, which would influence the final output of the teams. Rousseau et al. called the process of team interactions "teamwork behaviors".'*

### ***[B] Values shaping the intervention***

This intervention models and supports the values of respecting people, building intra-group trust and support, participation by and the empowerment of stakeholders and trusting a group to sustainably shape its culture through self-regulation.

The intervention de-emphasises the use of hierarchical authority (power) to effect compliance (control) and shape culture and change. Its design and approach recognises the widespread and demonstrated ineffectiveness of reliance on top down corporate directives to mandate that there will be no bullying, backed up with threats and punishments.

The intervention could also be described as organic, emergent, adaptable and non-directive in that awareness of, skilling in and practice of the various topics are not pre-planned but they are focussed on and engaged with when relevant to the group's conversation. In practice, therefore, after the group norms are established, the precise nature of the intervention from week to week will reflect what is going on in the workgroup and which of the professional practices and/or concepts are relevant.

### ***[C] Exploring a particular (possibly serendipitous) by-product of this approach: Are high performance workgroups created and sustained by this intervention?***

The interpersonal dynamics associated with group processes (such as those involved in constructive communication climates; negotiating emotional boundaries; authentic conversations, interactions and relationships at work) - to which I apply the umbrella label '*teamwork behaviours*' (Morgan Jr, Salas & Glickman 1993; Rousseau, Aubé & Savoie 2006) - not only prevent destructive communications, dysfunctional relationships, organisational processes and outcomes, but also create high performance, at the individual, group and

organisational levels, along with high levels of trust, staff retention, health and well-being, engagement, discretionary effort, professional and personal satisfaction and growth and lower levels of intention to leave (turnover).

In striving to make its communications and relationships more collaborative, respectful and human - and more emotion-centred - the workgroup is developing *teamwork behaviours* and is also effectively transforming itself into a high performance workgroup.

It can be argued – there is considerable theory (see reference to Hays' work below, for example) and reported data in support, but it remains to be tested - that the intervention amounts to equipping a group to become a *high performance team*. Many of the elements of the intervention we are teasing out here are well-established elements of what is required to produce or be a high performing team (Hays 2004).

Hays specified the following characteristics of high performance teams. Many are also characteristic of the climate that is created through the intervention.

The behaviours of high performance teams identified by Hays (2004), include:

- The capacity to generate stands –
  - Ability and willingness to commit (take a stand) to a goal, value, or level of performance or achievement that is beyond 'business as usual'.
  - There is always one or more core stand(s) driving team behaviour.
- Straight talk –
  - Open, honest and timely communication about team performance and effectiveness, including dialogue, debate and feedback.
  - Team members are direct with one another even when it is 'difficult' to be so
  - They are able and willing to give as well as receive feedback.
- Alignment –
  - Intellectual and behavioural agreement on goals, strategies, and processes for achieving them.
  - Team members work together effectively.
  - Team members work through differences and jointly prioritise tasks.
- Resourcefulness and Possibility
  - Invention, innovation and 'seeing outside the box'. Acceptance of new and different. Creative approaches.
  - Team members do not rule out 'half baked' ideas or rely on tried and true solutions or methods.
- Accountability and Responsibility
  - Team (shared) ownership and responsibility, while individual members know what they must do.
  - Team members hold one another accountable.
- Decisive, Coordinated Action
  - Team possesses and uses skills and tools to coordinate and track work.
  - Everyone knows what is required, by whom, when and how.
  - Work/activity is highly visible.
  - There is little time wasted moving from 'talk' to action.
- Accomplishment and Celebration
  - There is a continuous sense of progress and achievement.

- Team members create opportunities for celebrating success and achievement.
- Team does not wait until huge projects are finished to celebrate or acknowledge what they have done so far.
- Effectiveness in Breakdowns
  - Team turns breakdowns into breakthroughs.
  - Team members learn from successes and failures.
  - They possess the skills and employ methods to convert conflict and problems into solutions.
  - Team members are quick to recognise and 'call' (name) breakdowns and to initiate an intervention.
- Mutual Support and Coaching
  - The team has a dedicated learning and improvement agenda.
  - Performance improvement and development plans are a matter for the team, at least in part, but not exclusively [hidden] agreements between a manager and an employee.
  - Team members know what needs to be done and have a plan for doing it.
  - Team members ask for and volunteer help.
  - They help one another achieve success.

Indeed, the researcher has long been struck by the extensive overlap between the many of the processes, climate and behaviours associated with the theories underpinning this intervention and the processes, climate and behaviours associated with high performance. If these processes, climate and behaviours not only effectively shape (deliver) particular, desired, workplace climates, but as a by-product, also create high performing teams, we want to know about that. So the intervention, as a by-product, is exploring whether that possible insight (theory?) is backed up by the results.

The intervention therefore also tests whether participating workgroups become a high performing team.

### **The specific case of creating a climate/culture to prevent negative acts or bullying**

While it is widely appreciated that an organisation that is committed to being innovative, entrepreneurial or high performing, for example, needs to cultivate a culture that is supportive of such a commitment, there have also been numerous, explicit calls made in the relevant peer-reviewed literature for researchers to pay increased attention to shaping and sustaining an organisational climate or culture that, pro-actively, prevents bullying type behaviour. (Bullying is an expensive, harmful if not destructive – and so far irreducible and ineradicable – scourge for individuals, corporations, governments and national economies.)

The proposed project design also meets the numerous calls for preventive (pro-active), bottom-up (participatory), culture-shaping, process-focussed, locally-tailored and skills-based approaches that intervene at multiple levels; responds to the need for workgroup members to have a safe climate and opportunities where they can practice and engage in the capability-building necessary to enable them to have the courage, the skills and confidence to work through emotional reactions, resistance, challenges and fears that are likely to be encountered when negative acts are confronted (Meglich & Gumbus 2015).

The research will specifically test an approach to creating a workplace climate that -

- i. is collaborative
- ii. encourages and supports the continuous monitoring and maintenance of the desired, collaborative climate by the workgroup – i.e. it supports the empowered self-regulation of that climate
- iii. creates and maintains a safe space where people can learn and practice the skills to do these things – e.g. be collaborative and
- iv. encourages and is supportive of members challenging unacceptable behaviour
- v. enables workgroup members to feel safe to surface, work through and address (confront, talk about, ask for colleagues' help with) their own unique issues, concerns and blockers early on and so prevent negative acts being experienced
- vi. is conducive to high performance.

The intervention recognises the importance of and facilitates members' buy-in to and ownership of the process involved in the development, implementation, monitoring and review of preventive strategies and of the climate that enables everyone to work through resistance; to learn, adapt and practice new habits to achieve the desired outcome.

#### ***The operational perspective***

During the intervention, group members will be provided with regular opportunities at routine workgroup (team) meetings to create and sustain a climate where they can develop and practice the skills they need to use to prevent uncomfortable behaviour (negative acts) being experienced again and potentially developing into a bullying situation.

Effectively, the intervention creates a negative-acts-resistant, safe, collaborative climate by equipping, authorising and enabling workgroup members to pro-actively protect themselves from being treated in an unacceptable manner; by strengthening their awareness of the

importance of voicing, promptly, if such treatment is experienced and giving them experiences of - and practice in - the periodic modelling of such pro-active voicing in a conducive climate.

The proposed intervention will equip, authorise and enable workgroup members to pro-actively protect themselves from being treated in an unacceptable manner. By so arming them and by creating and routinely enhancing an environment conducive to them exercising (practicing and witnessing the practice of) relevant powers and capabilities, the intervention is facilitating the potentially bullied – any potential victim of a negative act - to overcome their previous sense of powerlessness and fear of provoking retaliation by applying their learnings and using the tools, equipment, climate, authorisation and opportunities to prevent unacceptable behaviour and negative acts of any kind being repeated.

In short, a psychologically safe workplace climate is created and sustained where workgroup members can develop, practice and utilise their skills in straight talk (voicing) and in knowing when and how to engage in *bounded emotionality* and when and how to *negotiate and sustain emotional boundaries*. (The concept of bounded emotionality encourages the appropriate expression of emotion in organisations.)

This climate, these processes and skills development enable both the increasing and constraining of emotional expression. They enable emotions to be appropriately expressed but also for emotional boundaries to be openly explored, discussed, understood and mutually adjusted (negotiated) to maintain collaborative relationships, the bedrock condition for high performance.

In this context, in response to any act or behaviour experienced as negative – as being inappropriate or potentially a form of bullying - the emotion can be honoured and assessed and the act or behaviour confronted (appropriately; in a relationship-warming way) with the appropriate expression of emotion, thus enabling the act or behaviour to be surfaced, labelled, addressed and repetition prevented, with the expectation of (and actual) support of the workgroup.

Emotions and group processes (honest, dialogical conversations in safe settings) are central to organisational climate and culture shaping (Hartel 2008).

It is envisaged the intervention will create and sustain a high engagement, collaborative, high performance workgroup culture that uses reflective practice ('reflective conversation') to sustain itself and to be experienced as a psychologically safe workplace where emotions (and negotiating emotional boundaries), voicing, straight talk are welcome, encouraged and enhanced through practice, skilling and modelling; are facilitated and rewarded (recognised, valued) and where organisational-, colleague- and supervisor-support are perceived.

In this space, there will be a lot of dialogue and experiential learning going on. (Experiential learning is the process of learning through experience, and is more specifically defined as "learning through reflection on doing" (Felicia 2011).)

The research project will measure the impact of the intervention on not only the scale of the experience of negative behaviours but also on well-being, engagement and performance.

## ***Conceptual framework of the intervention – recognising the importance of emotional work***

A psychologically safe workplace climate is created and sustained where workgroup members can develop, practice and utilise their skills in knowing when and how to negotiate and sustain emotional boundaries. The safe workplace is sustained by the workgroup self-regulating – and self-directing any actions required - to maintain the climate it desires. (Such in-built self-direction and self-regulation dynamics create a sense of empowerment. It should be noted that empowerment is not one of the explicit intents – is not explicitly on the ‘curriculum’- of the intervention. That is not necessary; it grows and is nurtured through the group process, without being directly driven.)

This climate, these processes and the skills development involved enable both the increasing and the constraining of emotional expression. They enable emotional boundaries to be openly explored, discussed, understood and mutually adjusted to maintain collaborative relationships.

The implementation of a regime that only relies on the constraint of emotion could be used to control negative acts like bullying in organisations. The concept of *bounded emotionality*, however, that is embraced in this project, also encourages the appropriate expression of emotion in organisations. And behavioural coaches know well that emotions, when appropriately used, can be powerful and effective.

In this context, negative acts (such as inappropriate or bullying behaviour) can be confronted with the appropriate expression of emotion, thus enabling the negative act to be acknowledged and addressed in a collaborative, relationship-warming way.

By way of illustration, when addressing a bullying incident there would be a focus on EI (and its constituent or related concepts such a *bounded emotionality*, *negotiating emotional boundaries* and *finding compassion*), with the expression of emotion being designed to strengthen the relationship between the protagonists rather than, for example, on venting frustration, hurt, anger or gaining revenge. The intent of this approach is to draw attention to the unacceptable behaviour early on, negotiate its abandonment (non-repetition) and reduce the possibility of the confrontation escalating.

### ***The thinking behind the design of the intervention***

The thinking behind this framework is that negative acts - unacceptable behaviours like bullying, harassment, any stressful, toxic workplace experiences - can be reduced, if not prevented, by enhancing group members’ sense of safety to confront another’s behaviour while maintaining, if not warming, the relationship when communicating their emotion about the behaviour and by inculcating the skills required to reduce the possibility of the experience being repeated and the confrontation escalating.

As group members develop the necessary skills, gain greater awareness of the need to - and have appropriate opportunities and supportive workplace climates in which to - practice, fine-tune and apply their capabilities to safely and promptly confront (surface, communicate about) unacceptable behaviour, they will be better able to prevent such behaviour and to pro-actively maintain group and personal health, effectiveness, performance, communications and relationships. These are the skills and awareness that the intervention aims to enhance.



This thinking or theory flows logically, at the conceptual level, from recognising that problematic workplace communications, dynamics and experiences are, both at root and on the surface, all about human communications, relationships, emotions, behaviours and the context (climate, culture) that shapes and/or allows them and it follows, therefore, that effective solutions or prevention strategies should also be all about - and be found in the fields of human communications, relationships, emotions, behaviours and the organisational context (climate, culture).

At a practical level, we know that to stop someone from repeating behaviour that makes us feel uncomfortable, we need to let them know that that is how their behaviour makes us feel. (If we don't, that behaviour will almost certainly be repeated and shortly be experienced as repeated toxic behaviour - which is what bullying is and negative acts are.)

Some people have the skills and capacity to speak up about their discomfort without antagonising the perpetrator. Many don't have these skills or capacity, but can develop them. Some others, who don't have the skills or capacity, find acquiring them too difficult. Many others, possibly the majority of bullied people, find the prospect of confronting a bully unthinkable in light of the risks they face of being further harmed by the power and the cultural and behavioural realities and dynamics of their workplace. (Bullying is, after all, largely a social or community-based phenomenon (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik 2010). Most targets rightly sense the bully has the support of others in the organisation for acting as they do and sense they simply cannot win from confronting the perpetrator.) Consequently, targets need a safe environment where they feel safe to voice their ideas, suggestions, discomforts or concerns with their colleagues, knowing they will be respectfully heard and be supported.

Such a safe workplace environment allows all members to talk about any concerns without being fearful of retaliation and so even those who do have the capacities to confront unacceptable behaviour head on, may find it easier to talk about their concerns, early on, in the workgroup. The workgroup becomes more trusting, collaborative, healthier and empowered as a result – indeed, every time it is used for such work. Which has flow-on benefits for the group's performance on other fronts – e.g. engagement, satisfaction, growth, flow, innovation, change, outputs and productivity.

### ***Special features of this intervention and their rationales***

Underlying the design of the intervention are several key and relatively unexplored ideas. The first idea is to pro-actively tackle the problem of negative acts through intervention at the level of the workgroup.

Although the insight seems rare, others have observed that to reduce and prevent negative acts it is important to work (intervene) at the level of the workgroup and create opportunities for dialogue:

*'A study of the perceptions and coping strategies of 40 young workers in Sao Paulo, Brazil found that the participants saw a need for the organisation to establish – 'spaces for dialogue' and 'informal meetings (inter alia)' (Turte et al. 2012).*

The extensive research undertaken at the US Department of Veterans Affairs into addressing a widespread culture of negative acts involved action research – that empowered workgroups to understand and tackle themselves their local problem(s) - at the level of the workgroup and it was effective (Keashly & Neuman 2004).

Secondly, implicit in this notion (of tackling problems at the workgroup level) is the notion of letting or expecting the workgroup to do as much as it can to fix the problem. This notion of empowering the workgroup to understand and tackle its problems is not new either:

*'The staff should be involved wherever possible in the formulation of policy and procedures concerning the 'health' of the working environment, their team working and safety aspects. It should be made clear to employees that they are free to discuss the problems that difficult interpersonal relationships may create.'*  
(Randall 1997)

Interestingly, the DVA project also effectively empowered workgroups to understand and address their own local challenges.

The third idea is the concept of *group process* is widely recognised and experienced by organisational practitioners and consultants that special (unpredictable, positive) things – dynamics – can happen in groups. Group dynamics, like interpersonal relationships, do not follow straight lines and viral processes and synergies are frequently experienced. As Herrero (2008) has described, viral processes can be channelled. The proposed intervention does exactly this; it triggers and channels viral change in the workplace atmospherics towards collaborative behaviour – which crowds out negative acts.



Building and  
Shaping Desired  
Workplace  
Practice

# Building and Shaping Desired Workplace Practice

The WLF Desired Workplace Practice program is innovative and powerful, in that it brings out the best in participants because everyone in the workgroup, team or organisation is involved in articulating the workplace behaviours they want in order to achieve their ideal work environment. This participation builds a sense of feeling trusted, of ownership, of accountability and of being empowered to ensure that the desired behaviours are being lived, sustained and enhanced continuously.

Through participation in reflective conversations at regular group meetings, group members have opportunities to take responsibility for self-regulating the living-out of the desired behaviours and for designing, implementing and monitoring the effectiveness of any changes, improvements or other initiatives associated with bringing them to life.

By using those regular opportunities to share their reflections, experiences and ideas the participants become equipped (skilled) and practiced in exercising that responsibility.

## **Our Program is grounded in and shaped by;**

- contemporary understandings of human behaviour and organisational change
- our effective, proven participatory approach to workplace behaviour-shaping
- ensuring individual, workgroup or professional needs are addressed to drive and facilitate continuous improvement

## **Building & sustaining ownership and engagement**

- A cornerstone of the program's design is the concept that workgroups need a safe space in which to build and nourish a sense of ownership and pride in behaviour-shaping
- The process used to build that sense of ownership serves valuable additional purposes:
  - i. It ensures that local workplace practices are regularly surfaced, discussed and prioritised, having been heard by all members, including by the leaders, of the group
  - ii. It provides regular opportunities for every member of the group to share with others any challenges they may face that could have adverse impacts on staff or clients
  - iii. It is in this psychologically safe space that each workgroup becomes practiced and increasingly effective in creating and maintaining the desired behaviour
  - iv. It provides regular opportunities for group members to learn, model, practice, and enhance their emotional intelligence skills

## **Grounded in science**

Our program is also grounded in the relevant fields of the science of human and organization behaviour, relationship-building and maintenance and in extensive doctoral research on approaches to the prevention of stressful workplace behaviours and threats to productivity and effective client outcomes.

## **Grounded in precedent**

Our comprehensive search of the world's academic literature revealed only one successful approach to surfacing and sustainably tackling problematic, deep-seated, behavioural challenges in a large, complex organization.

This research showed that the most effective component of the success of the program was the workgroup conversations facilitated by the consultants and the empowerment of the participants to identify, understand and solve challenges and measure and report the effectiveness of changes made.

### **Based on our own research**

Our recently completed, private sector-sponsored research on the effectiveness of our approach to shaping workplace practice proved up the success of our cost-effective methodology in improving engagement, group psychological safety (trust), collaborative behaviours, emotional intelligence, voicing (speaking up) and well-being.

### **Our team**

Our design and implementation team comprises two highly qualified and experienced consultants, with extensive backgrounds as hands-on managers, coaches and consultants in the fields of organisational behaviour, organisational development, culture-change, executive and team coaching, high performing teams, human potential and group processes.

### **Our approach meets key requirements:**

- It is empowering of individuals and workgroups, thus achieving high levels of engagement, experiential learning, relationship-building, growth, ownership and accountability for delivering high performance.
- Continuous improvement is embedded.
- It is self-sustaining.
- It involves on-going organisational, workgroup and individual capability-building.
- It encourages and facilitates sharing and collaboration.
- The program's effectiveness can be regularly surveyed and reported back to the participants.
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of workgroup-sponsored initiatives can become routine.
- The importance of voicing (respectfully) in the interests of one's own and one's colleagues' wellbeing is regularly brought to front-of-mind of participants and the skills to voice are learned, modelled and practiced.

### **Optional data collection to inform evaluation**

- Every participant in each workshop/workgroup can be invited to anonymously complete an effectiveness survey before the behaviour-shaping process starts and again after the first 6 and every 12 months of their participation in the process.
- The consultants can analyse the survey data by group and provide the results to every group member/participant.
- The results of the group surveys can be compiled and reported anonymously at a cohort or corporate level.

### **Contact**

To explore how your organization can benefit from this proven, ground-breaking approach, please contact Gil Sawford on [REDACTED], or Graham Gourlay on [REDACTED]



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# Reflective Conversation

## ***What is this about?***

*'Reflective practice or having some reflective conversation is the practice of periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning of what has recently transpired to ourselves and to others in our immediate environment. It illuminates what the self and others have experienced, providing a basis for future action.'* (Raelin JA)

- It provides an opportunity (in a group) to bring to the surface, to share (and to be, indeed, to actually feel heard talking about) – in the safe\* presence of trusting peers – social, political and emotional perspectives or 'data' that arise from direct experience with one another.
- These perspectives or 'data' are often precisely those that might be blocking operational effectiveness or healthy communications and relationships.
- Having reflective conversation recognizes the human need to include others in the examination of experience in our life. It is grounded in the concept that human beings are social animals whose good is bound up with the good of the group and in the egalitarian tradition in Western thought that recognizes that the dignity of human persons is achieved only in community with others.
- Such conversations provide a basis for mutual caring relationships.
- Reflective practice, while recognizing the value of private reflection, opens up for scrutiny (by their colleagues in the group) the group members' interpretations and evaluations of their plans and actions and their assumptions.

[\* The idea of creating, holding and using a 'safe space' is so fundamental to the concept of 'reflective practice' that the two terms are sometimes used interchangeably.]

## ***The role of the leader***

Reflective conversations are sponsored and facilitated by – are the essence of - a 'convening' or an 'engagement-centred' style of leadership. What does this style of leadership look like?

*"This concept of leadership means that in addition to embracing their own humanity; which is the work of every person, the core task of leaders is to create the conditions for civic or institutional engagement. They do this through the power they have to name the debate and design gatherings."*

*... "Leadership begins with understanding that every gathering is an opportunity to deepen accountability and commitment through engagement. It doesn't matter what the stated purpose of the gathering is."*

*Each gathering serves two functions: to address its stated purpose, its business issues; and to be an occasion for each person to decide to become engaged as an owner. The leader's task is to structure the place and experience of these occasions to move the culture toward shared ownership."*

*... "The world does not need leaders to better define issues, or to orchestrate better planning or project management. What it needs is for the issues and the plans to have more of an impact, and that comes from citizen accountability and commitment. Engagement is the means through which there can be a shift in caring for the well-being of the whole, and the task of leader as convenor is to produce that engagement."*

*... the task of leadership is to - provide context and produce engagement, to tend to our social fabric. ... - to engage groups of people in a way that creates accountability and commitment."*

*"Convening leaders create and manage the social space within which citizens get deeply engaged. Through this engagement, citizens discover that it is in their power to resolve something or at least move the action forward. Engagement, and the accountability that grows out of it, occurs when we ask people to be in charge of their own experience and act on the well-being of the whole. Leaders do this by naming a new context and convening people into new conversations through questions that demand personal investment. ...*

*"This kind of leadership – convening, naming the question, and listening – is restorative and produces energy rather than consumes it. It is leadership that creates accountability as it confronts people with their freedom. In this way, engagement-centred leaders bring kitchen table and street corner democracy into being."*

[Block, P., 'Community – The Structure of Belonging' (Berrett Koehler 2008)]

### ***Rationale for engaging in reflective practice***

There are several reasons for embracing this practice:

1. At times, we are, unfortunately, unaware of our behavior and its consequences. To complicate matters, our unawareness occasionally does not allow us to be open to new data or information that would help us learn from our actions. We may even be unaware that the questions we ask might be producing defensiveness in others, closing off the possibility of generating new information, even new questions. Often, only through the support of feedback from others in an open dialogue can we become receptive to alternative ways of reasoning and behaving.
2. There is an unfortunate gap between what many of us say we will do and what we actually do. We are simply guilty of deceiving ourselves that we can practice what



we preach. It can be beneficial therefore if our colleagues feel empowered to - and have opportunity to - let us know how they are experiencing us.

3. Most of us are biased in how we obtain information that, in turn, produces cognitive “errors” in our perceptions of reality. Errors constitute such practices as collecting data superficially, ignoring certain pieces of information, making assumptions about data rather than investigating them, or using self-confirming reasoning. However, if we are interested in improving our managerial practices, we have to become aware of these so-called errors. Such an awareness is extremely difficult to awaken without the involvement of peers who can detect and speak up in safety about the use of untested assumptions and raw biases.
4. Although intuition and past practices can give us very cogent clues in deciphering future situations, often the new situation presents itself in a different context. Prior solutions may not fit, even if the new situations appear alike. We tend to look, however, for the similarities between the situations rather than the differences. This type of normal cognitive processing can play tricks on us. Even when we consult a repertoire of available responses, we may not find one that fits the new situation.

Graham Gourlay

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