The 4th ism

Change Management seen through three management paradigms

by Klaus Guldbjergsen
Introduction

The wind of change has been blowing through most public and private enterprises in the past years. Many enterprises have seen how changed conditions have led to cost reductions and, in many cases, dismissals. For others, changes have led to restructuring and new forms of cooperation – for example through strategic alliances, merges and acquisitions. Finally, a number of enterprises have decided to focus on the norms and culture of the organisation in addition to more tangible changes. This scenario has typically been dominated by headlines such as commercialisation, customer focus, performance culture, flexibility and cost efficiency.

Besides the differences in the domain, which is subject to change, the change management applied to realise new agendas is also very multi-faceted. The change management approaches, which are practised, are partly rooted in various company traditions, partly in theoretical models, which in many ways are very different and in direct contrast to each other.

Management theory and practice within change management arise from three schools or -isms. This article describes the three isms, their potential and limitations.

Rationalism

Rationalism stems from the picture of the organisation as a targeting machine, which formed the basis for management theories from the beginning of the last century and up to the late sixties where the machine metaphor peaked\(^1\). The ism is based on the word “rational” to emphasise the meaning which, within this school, is attached to work in the objective/rational world. Within rationalism, management decisions are based on the explicit goals of the organisation, after which data is collected and the most efficient solution in relation to the problem is chosen based on known well-documented solutions\(^2\).

Within rationalism, the managerial task is to organise efforts so that the machine is working as efficiently as possible. To do this, the management has various structural and administrative tools. Such tools may be: 1. Organisation structure, which defines the purpose of the individual units, references and authority, 2. Job descriptions, which attach duties and authority to positions – not persons, 3. Process descriptions, which describe best practice for the job, 4. Explicit performance criteria, which clarify the goals for the individual person, 5. Recruitment procedures, which ensure the right qualifications, 6. Control, sanctions and rewards to ensure that structure, rules and procedures are followed.

Early rationalists perceived change as a disturbance, which (unfortunately) occurred from time to time and destroyed the existing order. Consequently, change is to be implemented as quickly as possible to re-establish stability and efficiency. The best implementation method is the “top-down” approach where the structure, processes and systems of the organisation are optimised in relation to the new conditions. Within rationalism, management change was thus not considered as an

\(^1\) This paragraph is based on David Jafee: *Organization Theory – Tension and Change*

\(^2\) The method for problem solving, which is a key element in rationalism, is based on a belief that “one-to-one” connections between problems, causes and solutions can be established in the organisational world. The central role attributed to the rational model for problem solving within this ism has prompted that rationalism is also called the linear approach to management.
important management discipline – more as an incentive to apply management disciplines, which are connected with ordinary management optimisation.

However, during the sixties, the rationalists’ perception of change shifted as the surroundings of the organisations were considered to be more unstable. A more change-focused view on organisation and management thus gradually took over and eliminated the more stable-centred viewpoints. The altered view on change brought about the development of an approach to change management under the headline, *planned change*. The idea of this headline is that change is to be planned and executed by a *change agent* (often the top management or an external consultant). The responsibility of the change agent is to ensure *implementation* of the required changes. This means that the organisation adapts to changes in the surroundings, which are beyond the control of the organisation.

The case below, which is from a change situation in the Dutch affiliate of a large international enterprise, illustrates change based on rationalism.

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**Case 3**

Pharma Ltd. is a heavily expanding international enterprise within the pharmaceutical sector based in Luton just north of London. The Dutch affiliate was founded in 1934 and family owned until acquired by Pharma Ltd. in 1999.

After the acquisition, the Dutch affiliate continued business more or less as usual for several years. However, by the end of 2008, rumours had it that changes were about to happen. The employees had read in the news that the international financial crisis had come at a very inconvenient time. In the years prior to the crisis, Pharma had completed a large acquisition of a German pharmaceutical enterprise. At the same time, heavy investments had been made in R&D and rights to own products in the US were bought back and own sales organisations in Russia, China and Mexico established. The expansive three-leg strategy had prompted that the enterprise had accumulated substantial debt and a heavy interest burden. Also, the enterprise saw a heavy price pressure and falling market shares – not least owing to fierce competition in the important Asian markets.

In January 2009, the employees were invited to a meeting in the staff restaurant under the headline: New strategy. No one knew what to expect, but rumours were many. At the meeting, the British CEO announced that the management in the past six months had formulated a new strategy based on comprehensive analyses, with the heading: Profitable organic growth – a new mindset. The strategy included a global structure organised by functions where the Dutch departments in the future should refer to the British functional managers. Additionally, the strategy also comprised a new training programme under the heading ”Aiming for the gold” and a new performance-based pay system. Finally, a new production strategy was also developed where the unit in the Netherlands in the future, like it was formulated at the meeting, should change from ”optimising and producing incessantly to be a testing and upscaling unit for new products”. The subsequent volume production should be outsourced to China and Korea.

One of the results of the new strategy were, that all units had to cut the number of employees. The Netherlands should make a reduction of 25%, equal to 50 positions. Dismissals should be made by the end of February.

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3 Out of respect for the anonymity of the enterprise, the description of the context has been altered.
The CEO regretted that such dramatic changes were required. Like the CEO said: "We would all rather have continued of the path we had chosen". However, the new business conditions arising from the financial crisis had necessitated the strategy. Arguments stating that the strategy would deal with a number of cross-organisational coordination issues, which many employees had experienced previously, and that the new structure would create a shorter distance to the group management and the colleagues around the world were presented.

After the presentation, the shop steward asked whether the new strategy expressed a wish to increase the decision power in the group management in Luton. To this, the CEO replied that the strategy was developed "on the basis of an objective business analysis".

Six months later, the dismissals had been carried out, structural changes implemented, the new production setup established and all employees had been on a two-day course in the new mindset. At the end of the year, the employees could read an interview in the employee magazine with the CEO saying that the strategy had now been fully implemented and the desired cost reductions realised.

Although management theory for decades has declared rationalism stone dead, there are many new examples of changes which, like case 1, are based on the rationalist approach to change management:

1. Change is a disruptive element – at times a necessary response to changes in the surroundings. The role of change is to restore order
2. Change is planned by a strong change agent and implemented "Top-down"
3. The primary measures to create change are integrated actions within structure, systems, processes and training
4. Organisational issues can be described objectively
5. We know the most appropriate management tools to tackle the issues we encounter.

Functionalism

In the late sixties, a new mangement perspective called functionalism was fostered. This ism perceives the organisation as a living organism, which must meet four important functions to survive: to ensure access to necessary resources from the surroundings (adaptation), to formulate and pursue goals, to coordinate activities (integration) and keep and adjust the mindset through culture.

To maintain, develop and coordinate these four crucial functions, the functionalists developed a new management discipline: Strategic management, which is described as a process consisting of two sharply defined steps: Strategy formulation and implementation (change management).

After years where functionalists had worked to refine the models for strategic management, not much progress was made in relation to change management until John P. Kotter in 1995 issued his groundbreaking book "Leading Change". In the book, which is still the most used and cited book about change management, Kotter describes, on the basis of his experience from more than 100 enterprises, the eight classic mistakes, which are often made in a change process. Based on the eight
classic mistakes, he presents eight steps that must be implemented in proper order to be successful with respect to change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The 8 steps</th>
<th>Key content of the individual steps</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a Sense of Urgency</td>
<td>Examining market and competitive realities. Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises and major opportunities. Provoking a crisis and make unattainable goals, if necessary. Change will not happen until at least 75% of the managers in the organisation is convinced that business-as-usual is utterly unacceptable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Form a Powerful Guiding Coalition</td>
<td>Assembling a group with enough power to lead the change effort. Encouraging the group to work together as a team. The team will conduct a number of meetings and workshops away from the enterprise where problems are analysed and opportunities explored. The top manager is always part of the team.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create a vision</td>
<td>Creating a vision to help direct the change effort. The vision must be easy to communicate and attractive to the interested parties. Developing strategies for achieving the vision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate the Vision</td>
<td>Using every possible means to communicate the new vision and strategies. Teaching new behaviours by the example of the guiding coalition <em>(walk the talk)</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Empowering Others to Act on the Vision</td>
<td>Getting rid of obstacles to change (systems, structure and people). Recognizing and rewarding employees involved in the improvements. Encourage risk taking and actions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning for and Creating Short-Term Wins</td>
<td>Plan and realise quick visible wins. Reward those who facilitated the wins.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consolidating Improvements and Producing Still More Change</td>
<td>Using increased credibility to change systems, structures and policies that don’t fit the vision. Hiring, promoting and developing employees who will live the vision. Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes and change agents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institutionalizing New Approaches</td>
<td>Articulating the connections between the new behaviours and corporate success. Achieve better results through more successful behaviour and more efficient management. Hire and develop management in line with the vision.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1: Eight Steps to Transforming Your Organization

Kotter’s eight-stage process has clear relations to the model of rationalism for planned change: Change as a planned process, top-down approach, change agent (the guiding coalition) and data and rationality as the basis for change. Additionally, the organisation metaphor of functionalism is also included in the model: The organisation as a live organism, which must adopt to changes in the surroundings in order to survive.

When Kotter’s model was published in an article in Harvard Business Review in 1995 and later when the book *Leading Change* was published, a massive response came from the management world. The book immediately hit number one on the bestseller list of management literature, where it held its position for a long time. Many saw Kotter’s method as the first qualified solution in more

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4 John P. Kotter: *Leading Change* page 26 - 27
than 40 years to tackle the phenomenon ”resistance to change” – a phenomenon, which in the 90s where perceived by many managers and theoretists as one of the greatest management challenges.

Among the new concepts Kotter introduced and which have since been key elements in management terminology were: *The burning platform* (sense of urgency), *power of vision*, *walk the talk* (the visible and symbolic actions of top management) and *reap the harvest* (generating short-term results). With this Kotter has, besides introducing a new coherent model, also contributed to develop a new language relating to change management.

At the same time and in line with functionalism, Kotter also brought culture into play as an important function paramount to continual change. In his approach to culture, Kotter accelerated from modernism’s somewhat instrumental approach to culture, where culture is perceived as a component, which can be affected (implemented) in a relatively simple manner. Although this part of Kotter’s model prompted some criticism, Kotter’s eight-step model was quickly regarded as the model for change management.

The case below illustrates the functionalist approach to change where several elements of Kotter’s model are also in play.

**Case 2**

In the mid 90s, a large service enterprise faced still growing challenges in keeping customers. The consequences of low customer loyalty were falling sales and earnings. Management decided to establish a project group led by the CEO, who was told to “think out of the box” and develop a strategy that could revert the negative development.

The project group chose an analytic approach and initiated a comprehensive customer satisfaction survey, which included more than 2,000 customers, to identify the most important reasons for customer satisfaction and loyalty. After six months, the results of the project group’s efforts were ready. The customer survey documented, that variations in the service quality were the main reason for unsatisfied customers and that a high staff turnover could explain more than 80 percent of the service quality problems.

After further analyses, the project group found the connection between service quality and staff turnover. When a staff member resigned, it took weeks before a replacement was found. In addition, yet another period was assigned to training and for the new staff member to familiarise with the customer’s needs. In this period, the customer experienced a poor level of quality. At the same time, analyses of staff turnover showed that the recruitment process and a much too cursory training programme of new employees were the primary reasons why employees left the company.

Based on the analyses, the project group developed a new vision about “The good circle”. The model behind the circle was: 1. That a more systematic recruitment process and training programme would foster competent, motivated and loyal employees, 2. That competent, motivated and loyal employees are the primary source to happy customers, 3. That happy and loyal customers are paramount to profitability and growth, 4. That profitability and growth are preconditions for forming a company, which can attract and retain motivated and competent employees.
Subsequently, the project group found a recruitment model called realistic recruiting\(^5\), which could document a very positive effect on the "survival rate" among newly employed. This model formed the basis for a new recruitment, introduction and socialisation concept, The JobCenter, which should act as a booster rocket to "the good circle".

The results of the project group’s analyses and the new vision were presented at a management seminar where the 100 top managers from the enterprise participated. The seminar used "the negative circle" as a starting point where the validity of the circle was proved by regression analyses, which documented the connection from employee satisfaction to employee loyalty to customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability. Eventually, "the good circle", realistic recruitment and The JobCenter were presented together with a plan for the implementation of the new concept in the organisation.

A crucial factor in the change plan was a "quick hit" where The JobCenter was implemented in one of the regions of the enterprise. Management decided to take the lead and took a great number of the shifts in the new centre, mid-level managers were encouraged to do the same. The mid-level managers quickly understood the message and soon all shifts in the centre were taken by managers from all levels of the company.

During the pilot project, some obstacles, which had to be challenged, were presented. The obstacles were partly managers who did not believe in the concept and thus did not want to contribute to the mutual funding of The JobCenter. After a friendly chat with the CEO where the managers were asked whether they were willing to put their job on the line with their viewpoints, criticism stopped. Also managing employees from the IT department were invited to a friendly chat as they did not find it important to prioritise system support to the new concept.

After six months, all managers were invited to a new conference. This time to see The JobCenter in practice and to be informed about the results The JobCenter had generated in the test region. The results were impressive. The pilot project showed that The JobCenter had helped reduce staff turnover by more than 50 percent and that the bottom line in the test region had increased more than 25 percent thanks to increased customer loyalty. The project group was called to the podium and applauded by the audience, and at the same time the management lavishly rewarded the new heros with bonuses. The conference was eventually finished with a presentation off the introduction of a new plan for the launch of The JobCenter in the rest of the organisation within a period of one year.

In the following years, The JobCenter was exported to several affiliates, where new functions were added to the concept. Finally, the good circle and realistic recruiting were the center point for the enterprises training activities, where models and tools to support the good circle came into focus.

Some characteristics of Kotter’s model are found in case 2:

- The burning platform: Quantification of the enterprise’s problems with keeping customers and the consequences for the bottom line
- Establishment of a strong guiding coalition (the project group)

\(^5\) John Parcher Wanous: *Organizational Entry* (Addison-Wesley Company 1992)
• Development of the strategy and future plans as a linear process, which was 90 percent analytically based
• The vision was marketed "top-down" and supported by "Walk the Talk" (the management and project group took shifts in the JobCenter)
• Hurdles were removed to form a basis for action (a friendly chat with the CEO)
• Short-term results were generated by a well-documented pilot project
• The results were consolidated and more change was created through gradual implementation of the vision (materialised in the form of The JobCenter)
• Change was incorporated into the culture through systematic selection, socialisation and training of managers

Case 2 also illustrates some of the criticism that has been aimed at the classic linear approach to change management, not least in the new century. One point of criticism, which is clearly illustrated in case 2, is the great use of resources, which the process requires of the organisation, and the long-term focused efforts, which are a prerequisite for realising the strategy. How many changes of this type can be implemented by a company within a five-year period? And is that number of changes sufficient to tackle turbulence in the surroundings?

Social constructivism

To illustrate what social constructivism has to offer when change is on the agenda, we will start with a small exercise, which is suitable for communicating two of the most important points within social constructivism.

Rest your eyes on the picture to the right. Do not read on before you have made some thoughts about what you see.

The picture may be interpreted in many ways. The most frequent interpretations are the following: "Some dolphins playing in the sea", "A muddy field with vehicle tracks" "A tree which has lost its leaves", "A dalmatian which has picked up the scent of something..."

When more people are looking at the picture at the same time, a spontaneous discussion always breaks out about what it is, that we are seeing. Most often, people go to the screen during the discussion to point and explain. After a few minutes, the discussion is developing into a still stronger mutual interpretation of "what we see". Sometimes you can hear participants mumbling to themselves "really, I thought it was...".

Then you may ask: How do we explain the many different interpretations at first? Here the answer is always slightly reflection typical: It depends on the eyes of the beholder. Or in other words, when we see and perceive the picture differently, we are looking for different things (we do not have the same focus, or we have different goals). Therefore, we choose, consciously or unconsciously, to see something and overlook something else. The next thing that happens is that we realise that we perceive things differently (we see things from our own perspective = opinions, experience...). This
concept, which is called selective perception within social constructivism, leads us to the first important point: *Organisations do not have one reality only.*

The group may then be asked: What do you see now? And here the response is almost always ”A dalmatian which has picked up the scent of something and is moving towards a tree…” And all, maybe except from one pharisee, agree that that is what we are seeing. This part of the exercise has another important point in relation to the new paradigm: *Together we create our mutual reality.* Reality and truth are created through dialogue and negotiation with people we believe to be important. Within management theory, *community of practice* is a term often used about the networks we use when constructing reality. This is where we, together, create *meaning* to our experiences in the organisation.

When the wind of change is blowing, these two points signifies that *change in a social constructive perspective cannot occur before the change has been negotiated and added meaning in the communities of practice.* The consequences are firstly that change must be seen as a process where all parties are involved, and where room is made for meaning creation in the communities of practice (forget the concept of a guiding coalition). Secondly, it is extremely difficult to predict the result of a change process, which challenges the entire idea of change as a planned process consisting of a number of limited steps.

A third basic principle of social constructivism is *the magic power of positive thought* – the idea of organisations as heliotropic systems which, like plants, grow towards the sun. When change is on the agenda, this principle means, that it is important to direct the energy towards positive expectations to the future instead of aiming the energy from the problems off the past. Based on the terminology from functionalism, this means that the vision must form the starting point in a change process instead of the burning platform. The figure below illustrates what the burning platform and the vision have to offer when the two concepts are seen in a social constructive perspective.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emotional reaction</th>
<th>The burning platform</th>
<th>Vision (strong desire)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative feelings such as fear, guilt,</td>
<td>Positive feelings such as trust, curiousity,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>uncertainty, insecurity, anger,</td>
<td>happiness, hope, optimism and openness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>powerlessness and hopelessness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The feelings calls</td>
<td>Defensive actions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for the following</td>
<td>- Flight: The others fault</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reactions</td>
<td>- Freeze: I stay passive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Fight: I disagree</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developing actions:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Creativity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Engagement and involvement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Drive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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*Figure 2: Contributions of the burning platform and vision to the change process*

The basic principles on which social constructivism is based challenge the entire foundation of the approach of modernism and functionalism to change management. Social constructivism’s criticism of the classic approach to change management can be summarised as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics of the classic approach to change</th>
<th>Social Constructivism’s criticism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change is a deviation that comes “one by one”.</td>
<td>Change is not a deviation, but a state. The consequences are that complex models, with many steps, cannot deal with the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
should contribute to restore order. turbulence we meet. At the same time, attitude (disorder) plays a part in creating a sentiment where change is perceived as something uncomfortable to get over and done with.

Change management is about handling resistance to change

According to Kotter, the "core in everything is always to get people to change behaviour". This definition covers the perception that some people change (use power) and others are changed (feel powerless). The social constructivist viewpoint is that resistance occurs when we feel powerless. Negative feelings are further strengthened when past problems are the starting point for the change process (burning platform) and when no room is made for meaning creation in the communities of practice. If change at the same time is built on simple cause/effect relationships and does not reflect the complexity which characterises social systems, the creation of meaning will meet many obstacles and may easily result in resistance and a lack of confidence in management.

Change consists of a number of steps to be completed in a certain order to ensure implementation

The organisational world is not linear, but circular – everything affects everything. The division into steps is based on the idea that it is possible to separate analysis, learning, action and planning. This idea is rejected by social constructivism. Life can only be understood backwards, but it must be lived forwards. We learn by acting, and learning leads to new recognition and new actions. Learning and action cannot be separated – the "steps" must be much more fluid and include many reflection and reorientation points.

Figure 3: Social constructivism’s criticism of the classic approach to change management

Social constructivists also find the meaning we attach to "resistance to change" when we use the classic approach to change management as a starting point very critical. The problem is that the principal condition, besides the facts already mentioned in the table, impedes a more nuanced view on changes, which are implemented. If an employee expresses doubts about parts of the change because the knowledge of detail that he possesses has not been taken into consideration, there is a risk that this knowledge is not included – that the employee is just categorised as an "opponent". The problem is worsened even further by the fact that the employees experiencing this psychologicalisation will not share their knowledge because they have learned that it is wrong to be "negative". The consequences are suppressed feelings, frustration and apathy, which confirms the manager in the view that "resistance against change" is the biggest challenge in change management.

From a social constructivist perspective, the basic principles of the classic approach to change management creates a cath 22 – a self-reinforcing negative spiral. When we realise that the biggest challenge in change is to handle resistance among employees, the problem lies with our selves. Resistance to change occurs as a result of our way of thinking and the way we deal with change. When we think "top-down", burning platform and linear process, we create resistance to change.

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6 John P. Kotter: Heart of Change page 10 (preface)
7 Poul Poder: Feelings of Power and Power of Feelings
In recent years, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has become increasingly widespread as a method within social constructivism that can be applied in relation to several classic management disciplines – including change management. Appreciative signifies the attitudinal foundation or the basic principles of the method and symbolises that focus is aimed at things that we really appreciate and which can thus create enthusiasm about change – our successes, strenghts and potential.

The principle is based on the generally acknowledged and empirically quite well-founded psychological principle – the pygmalion effect. The pygmalionic effect implies that the expectations we have to the people we meet contribute to making them who they are. For example, employees perform better when positive expectations are placed on them whereby the positive expectations are confirmed. Our negative expectations will also have an effect on our actions towards employees and make it harder for them to show us their positive sides. The conclusion is that our expectations contribute to build our reality.

Inquiry is the driving factor or the engine behind the method. Inquiry means to investigate, examine, discover, curiously ask questions and to be open to new ways of viewing the world and look for new possibilities.

Like the classic method for problem solving, Appreciative Inquiry is based on a desire to create a better world – for instance by increasing efficiency, improving cooperation, increasing quality, etc. The path from challenge to action is however widely different from the classic approach to problem solving. Where the classic problem-solving method is based on “sins” of the past (find the cause) and seeks to find the ”optimum” solution in our toolbox of well-proven and well-documented solutions, AI abandon the linear problem-focused model and is instead using situations, which provide the best performance, and our dreams for the future as a starting point.

The two models are described in the figure below.

![Diagram of 5D circle and linear problem-solving method]

**Linear problem-solving method**  
**5D circle**

*Figure 4: Two approaches to problem solving*

The fives steps of the 5D circle may include the following points:

**Definition**: What do we wish to promote? Change is given a motivating title.

**Discovery**: In this phase, the best moments are explored. At which point are we closest to our goal? What is it we do when things work the best? Which conditions promote the best moments?
**Dream:** What do we dream about? How is it materialised when the goal is reached? How can we conclude, that ”now we are there”? What do we do once we are there? What do we say? How do we feel? Can it be measured whether we have met our target? What is the first thing we will see when we are on the right track?

**Design:** What can we do to realise the dream? How can we create more factors that form the basis for the best moments? All possible solutions must be uncovered.

**Delivery:** What are we enthusiastic about doing together and individually – here and now? How will we know whether we succeed? How and when do we review the progress, learn and find new initiatives?

Case 3 illustrates how the 5D circle may be applied in a change situation.

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**Case 3**

A new HR manager was appointed in a large international enterprise. Previously the manager had worked as consultant for a two-year period in the HR department where she had experienced that her colleagues did not always pull in the same direction. Therefore she felt that one of her most important duties was to initiate a process to clarify the direction for HR. To initiate the process with a view to explore the common future, the manager and all the employees i HR reserved a couple of days to focus on the direction of the department.

The first assignment on the seminar was to agree on the process. The first discussions revealed that the employees had been slightly sceptical about ”yet another strategy seminar”. The common perception was, that previous participation in strategy seminars in which SWOT analyses and action plans had been presented had seldomly made a big difference. Some relief was thus detected when a new method was introduced, and also some curiosity about testing the method.

The first question was: Imagine that some of HR’s most important customers sit in the staff restaurant in two years talking about HR. What would you like them to say? The assignment was solved two-and-two, where the groups were asked to use half an A4 page to list the most important points as ‘minutes’ from the meeting.

Everyone was very enthusiastic about the assignment. The greatest challenge was to exclude what would be said today and to focus on what should be said in a couple of years. After a little help, the assignment progressed and after an hour everyone was ready to present their points. The conclusion was quite clear. All minutes with a few deviations circled around the same themes:

- HR is a good place to visit, the atmosphere is great
- Confidentiality, professionalism and quick delivery
- Great teamwork in HR
- They are important to us – they help us reach our goals

Spirits were high after the assignment. It felt good to have clarified that the dream was generally the same.

The next assignment was to find moments where the department had been closest to the dream. The assignment had a very slow start. It was difficult to pinpoint successes. However, after some time, the first good story emerged and after that, more stories quickly followed.
The next challenge was to explore the best moments. What happened behind the scene? What made the best moments possible?

This brought about many interesting points. From them, it appeared that situations where the department faced new challenges and where people cooperated about solving the assignments were often those where the department came closest to the dream. But also that the department had received many positive responses in relation to the way many of the resource-demanding assignments were solved (e.g. recruitment and stationing). After close investigation, attention was drawn to the fact that in relation to heavy repetitive assignments, positive feedback was given especially in situations where the employee followed the assignment "end to end". This exercise also resulted in new focus points. Among others, a better overview of the process for assignments in which several employees were involved.

The next assignment was to concretise the dream. Some of the questions in focus were: Which assignments do we have once we are where we want to be? How are we organised? What is the physical framework? How do we cooperate – internally and in relation to customers? How do we meet? How do we manage the value-adding processes? How do we measure ourselves? How do we follow-up on joint activities?

After this assignment, which lasted most of the afternoon and the entire evening, the department started the next morning by finding ways to reach the dream. The first job was to make a brainstorm on initiatives that could bring the department closer to the dream. And there were plenty of ideas. In a few hours, more than 50 big and small proposals were made on how the department should continue. All proposals were noted and after some familiarisation, no attempts were made to find deficiencies.

The last assignment, which lasted most of day two, was to choose from the plethora of great ideas and to coordinate initiatives. The model of enthusiasm formed the basis for this exercise. The initiatives were developed by asking the question: What are we most enthusiastic about? After the most important topic had been agreed on after some discussion, the next question was – who wants to work with that? What will you do? When the energy dissipated (after five general initiatives had been selected), focus was aimed on target and coordination. First by making the puzzle about coordinating time and resources for the initiatives. Then to identify sub-targets that indicate whether we are on the right track. And lastly, agree on the further course after the seminar.

When the department returned from the seminar, spirits were high, and the first agreements were soon realised. A day was set aside for feedback three months after the seminar. On the follow-up day, the first classic tool within change management was applied. Everyone was asked to spend five minutes listing the benefits and concerns in relation to changes in the department.

When the yellow post-its were put on the flipover, the result was exhilarating. There were three times as many benefits as concerns. When the benefits were grouped and "the best moments" discussed, it was clear that the best moments primarily occurred in situations where new forms of cooperation were tested. Previously, the employees generally worked alone with their assignments, but after the first seminar, it emerged that this working method was no longer preferable. After the seminar, all options had been used in order to find new ways of cooperation – also in relation to customers. There were several examples of how customers had given positive feedback on their
experience of a better atmosphere and better service in HR.

When the concerns were grouped, they evolved partly around resources, partly around the efforts to systemise value-adding processes, which had not proceeded as planned. Thus the rest of the day was spent on two rounds in the 5D circle, where the concerns were discussed and new initiatives made.

New follow-up activities were agreed on and end off the day. Among other things it was agreed that a focus interview should be made three months later where a group of the department’s customers would be asked to be “interviewed about HR in the staff restaurant” with an audience. The agreement also covered that the focus interview should form the foundation for a new seminar about the direction of the department, with Appreciative Inquiry as the method.

Case 3 illustrates several of the basic elements of social constructivism’s view on change:

- Change must be implemented as a collective learning process where energy, curiosity and the desire to be involved are created
- Everyone participates in the process
- Change management springs from a discussion about the future we want to create – not from an analysis of current problems
- The management’s focus should be aimed at the process – not the solution
- When everyone is involved in a meaningful process, traditional (selling) change management is not needed

At the same time, the example clearly shows how the principles for Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and the 5D Circle are the starting point for the process. Finally, it is worth noting how the point that we learn while we act and act while we learn clearly appears from the case – that we cannot separate analysis, learning, planning and actions in change processes for which reason many reorientation activities are important.

When represented to the approach of social constructivism for the first time, you may think: Will this approach only lead to the ”lowest common denominator”? Will it not end up in anarchy and group work? And ”We do not have time to involve everyone. It will be much to costly to implement a change process after this model”.

The answer to the two questions are that the process is the key. Without a good and carefully prepared process, the results may be very disappointing. With regard to concerns about time and resources, there is no doubt that the first step in the change process will require more time and carry more costs than a traditional ”top-down” process. Proponents of the social constructivist approach will however claim that the time and costs related to the first steps are an investment, which will be paid back in buckets when the change is put into practice.

In closing, although the social constructivist approach to change management and AI may seem very convincing, a note of caution should be sounded. This approach does not give the answer to all challenges in life. The potential of the third ism depends on the situation, like the first two isms.
Conclusion

This article has illustrated what the three paradigms: Rationalism, functionalism and social constructivism have to offer when change is on the agenda. As can be seen from the article, the change process will be quite different, depending on the ism you choose.

When you start a change process, it is important that you know which perspective you want to follow and that alternatives exist. As the father of culture theory Schein so beautifully puts it:

As a leader you have one and only one important choice:
Do you want to lead the culture or be led by the culture

If you simply reproduce the existing approach, you will be led by the culture whereby you may become the biggest obstacle for your own success.