Change 2.0
Joachim Klewes · Ralf Langen
Editors

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Foreword

“When the winds of change blow, some build walls, others build windmills.”
Chinese proverb

Those who want to engage professionally with change management today can choose from a wide range of publications. The available literature on this topic – particularly from the United States and the United Kingdom – fills many metres of shelf space. A Google search for “change management” yields almost two million hits. Readers interested in the topic can find essays and books for practitioners, scientific studies, and firsthand accounts. Given the mass of available information then, it seems reasonable to ask: is another book on change management really necessary?

We asked ourselves this question when we initially developed the concept for this book. Apart from the basic motivation of illuminating the topic from a European and, above all, a communications perspective, we had several reasons for tackling the topic of change.

First, there is the great relevance: today, organisations continuously face the challenge of change, whether they are companies, public bodies, or NGOs. Further, they have to initiate change themselves if they want to get ahead of, or even outlive, their competition. In times of globally networked business processes, accelerated business dynamics, and changing personnel structures, this may seem banal. But in fact, any organisation that closes itself off to change will end up like the dinosaurs, and become extinct. A large capacity and a strong will to change ensure the survival of an organisation. They are the basis for the much-extolled innovative spirit, that everyone likes to claim as their motto. In this sense, they are therefore an important foundation for an organisation’s reputation as well.

It is worth noting that the questions that arise when transforming an organisation are no different to those from thirty years ago. Namely, how can organisations shape change so that it has a lasting effect? Can resistance in a company be overcome, and if so, how? What part – if any – should employees play in the process, and how can they be motivated?

Today, the questions are the same. But the answers that managers can and must provide have changed. For example, communication has become
more important today. Instead of decrees from management, change today demands complex measures that allow for interaction and ensure transparency. Ideally, there are two main things that change processes must establish internally and externally: motivation and trust. For change, these are essential, as there is often a considerable gap between the wishes of management and the actual attitudes of most staff. This is hardly surprising. If an organisation is going through its fourth, fifth or sixth wave of change, a feeling of indifference (or worse still fear) can take hold. Fear and indifference paralyse an organisation, and can easily cause a transformation to fail.

Organisations that develop, implement and analyse strategies for change today must expend much more effort. And for most change situations, success can only be achieved with the involvement of the employees. The extent to which employees are involved – or more precisely: the extent to which they feel involved and taken seriously – decides whether the change succeeds or not.

It’s all about the people

To ensure the right degree of employee participation, companies with little or even no experience in change communications often call on external consultants. As Europe’s leading communications consultancy (with more than 1,000 employees in 15 key markets), Pleon is in demand as a partner to make change processes successful, and has comprehensive experience. The expertise of the agency is concentrated in the international Change & Transformation practice group.

Making this knowledge and this specifically European perspective available to a wider audience is the second reason for this book. For, the phenomenon of change can best be understood, described and explained on the basis of practical experience. This book is no academic treatise on change management (although some of the authors are, in fact, academics). Rather, it is a collection of articles intended to inspire those involved in the practical implementation of change. Our intention (and hope) is to give the reader food for thought and concrete advice.

For this reason, we include contributions not only from Pleon consultants, but also from other external experts, among them managers of organisations that have experience in managing change. A range of sectors are represented: from industrial companies large and small (in automobiles, healthcare, consumer goods and telecommunications) to the public sector.
For all managers who find themselves in similar situations, this ‘view from the inside’ provides valuable knowledge. For academics engaged in theoretical or empirical research, the articles presented here offer interesting insights that might modify their academic perspectives or suggest new avenues of research. And for students, it may be enriching to learn how change has been managed in actual cases, to counterbalance textbook approaches.

All the authors in this volume agree on one point: successful change is all about the people! This is especially worth noting because, beyond from this common denominator, we have put an emphasis on presenting a diverse range of opinions and experiences. This diversity is the third reason for this book. Among the authors, there are advocates of approaches emphasising employee involvement, those that put a focus on top-down management, and those somewhere in-between. That there was agreement on the importance of employees prompted us to title the book “Change 2.0” – with a look to the now-established internet trend in which interaction, participation, and democratisation play an important role.

The various perspectives presented in this volume are also the logical consequence of our own experience as consultants working with organisational change. Our experience shows there is no standard solution. Each organisation needs to develop its own approach and its own set of communications measures to change situations.

Our experience also has been incorporated into the development of our change model, which is presented in our article on pages 159 to 181. The model is intended, above all, to help organisations and decision makers distinguish between various kinds of organisational change, while not losing sight of the most important success factor: building trust in a focussed and systematic way.

To illustrate this, we chose a metaphor of five ‘expeditions’ that organisations in change can embark on. This is an attempt to reduce the complexity of organisational change without being trivial. The metaphors succeed in doing what scientific categories often fail to do: they stimulate discussion among those involved in the change process. And only through discussion, can those involved identify and agree what the basis of their organisation’s specific change is, and which factors influence it. We are prepared to accept an inevitable lack of scientific precision in favour of lively debate, or rather, a debate about the right way forward in the given situation.

We hope that the perspectives presented in this book offer the reader a detailed overall picture, and contribute to a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of change. We also hope that this book helps readers to implement change, and successfully use change for their organisation.
Acknowledgements

The power of an anthology such as this depends solely on the strength of the articles in it. Therefore, our thanks firstly go to all the contributing authors. They all have challenging careers that demand intellectual energy and time. Many of our readers will know how challenging it is to work in a job and write an article. This applies especially for articles that leave one open to the criticisms of colleagues or competitors. And for this reason alone, we highly value the contributions of our colleagues.

Were it not for discussions with numerous ‘masterminds’ at Pleon, especially Timo Sieg, Alex Schoep, Iain Halpin, and also Jan Jelle van Hasselt and Raymond Schra, we would have overlooked a number of important aspects of change. The international book team, led and spurred on by Benedict Winter, not only organised the project, but also vitally contributed to the content and structure – without neglecting their professional commitment to their clients. Particularly worth mentioning here are Kristin Schottmann, Kerstin Steglich, Sabine Stecher and Rudolf-Thassilo Hurth. We are grateful to Anita Schöne and Frauke Witte for typography, typesetting and layout, to Robert Culverhouse and Rowan Payton for translation, and to Daniel Penton for his critical proofreading. Our thanks also go to Dr Niels Peter Thomas of Springer for his patient and helpful guidance.

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As always, this project would have been a pipe dream without the understanding and backing of our families. We would therefore like to thank Christina, David, Julian, Sarah and Geraldine as well as Stefanie and Maria.

As the editors of this volume, we of course remain solely responsible for any remaining shortcomings. We therefore welcome your comments, critical or supportive: send us an e-mail to joachim.klewes@pleon.com and ralf.langen@pleon.com.

Joachim Klewes         Ralf Langen

Düsseldorf/Munich, January 2008
Everyone should be dissatisfied with the present situation and should constantly try to improve or change things. It’s important to realize that there is always something more we need to aim at. That’s what needs to be recognized by every individual. When you’re growing you’re satisfied with the status quo, and that’s no good.

Katsuaki Watanabe, CEO Toyota Motor Corporation, 2005–present
It may come as a surprise: Successful change management is mainly a matter of letting it happen

Paul J. Kohtes

Change is a constant factor in all areas of life – and business is no exception. Proven tools and recognised methods help executives guide their companies through the turbulent tides of change. But the right navigation methods alone are not enough to ensure the success of change processes. Each company or organisation is a vital organism with a heart, soul and identity all of its own. It can be shaped and modified, but cannot be bent without causing damage. At its most effective, change management draws life from the authentic values at the core of the company and its leadership.

“Everything flows and nothing is left unchanged; there is no true state of being, only an eternal becoming and transforming” – this passage, known as the flux doctrine, was written by Plato based on the teachings of Heraclitus. For companies operating under the pressure of globalisation, it has taken on a completely new dynamic. In the maelstrom of virtual information, between mega-mergers and downsizing spirals, only one thing remains certain: business is unpredictable. If you believe Plato, this has always been the case. The apparent slowness of earlier changes simply lulled us into believing we had everything under control and could determine what would happen in the future. Change management marks the departure from this illusion – and at the same time creates a new one: the belief that we only need the right theories and methods to be able to once again steer change along neatly organised tracks.

Targeted changes have long had a firm place on the corporate agenda, and are just as much a part of day-to-day business as are regular meetings of the management board. Two out of three corporations have undergone restructuring processes in recent years. At any given time, at least 40 percent can be found introducing cost-cutting programmes or changing their corporate strategies. Every third company has been faced with sometimes
significant changes as a result of mergers or acquisitions (Capgemini 2005). The rate of success, however, is sobering. It can be assumed, for example, that despite high financial outlays and a wide range of flanking measures, about 75 percent of all change projects will not achieve their objectives or will, in fact, fail completely (Vahs and Leister 2003). But why is this the case? Is it because the tools we have are not good enough? Or that executives are not up to the task (anymore)?

Accept change as a constant state

Ideally, a corporate identity takes shape like a river. The bubbling well-spring corresponds to the founding idea of a company. With the first plans and strategies, this spring rapidly gives birth to a stream. As a rule, it develops its own momentum, surging with astonishing dynamism. The direction and goal are not, at first, known quantities. When a company is in its start-up phase, much is still open, faceless and free of tradition. Like a body of water in motion, it reacts to its circumstances and – with the self-assurance of a sleepwalker – always seems to find the best route. From the perspective of a river, there are no change processes, since it owes its entire existence to adaptability – change is its state of being. When we look on in awe at the development of the Chinese economy, we would do well to remember that it owes its momentum to precisely such a “river” mindset. The old Chinese saying, “The heavens are high, the emperor is far away”, betrays a lack of concern for central authority that seems at odds with the industriousness and motivation we Westerners expect from the dynamically expanding Asian giant. Yet the power of the Chinese entrepreneurial spirit is undeniable. The corporate identity of a Western company, in contrast, is almost always established on a top-down basis.

Dismantle obstacles

This becomes clear when we take a closer look at a few phenomena that occur during change processes. The annual Gallup polls attest to a pessimistic outlook that has persisted for years at companies in Germany and elsewhere. Only one in ten employees – including more than a few managers – feels allied with his or her employer and is correspondingly motivated. The rest work by the book, at best (Geißler 2006). And there are increasing signs of fatigue even among those who would actually like to show commitment. As a result, emotional problems at the workplace have
Successful change management is mainly a matter of letting it happen by 70 percent in the last ten years, and every tenth day of absence from work can be attributed to psychological problems (Wirtschaftswoche 2007). Conditions such as these hardly promote the idea of getting involved in something new and viewing change as an opportunity. To put it figuratively, the surging torrent has dwindled into a mere trickle.

Still, only a few top managers recognise these signs of stagnation, often because they concentrate – with great dedication – on sending positive messages to their shareholders. In addition, the relationship to the company’s base, and not least to the employees, is easily lost. Where executives address only the public, internal and corporate identification can easily become an empty shell – without any vitality or élan (Deekeling and Arndt 2006). This does not mean there are no managers out there trying very hard to generate shared visions. But their efforts also often lack the natural impetus of water in motion. According to a survey by the German market research institute Forsa, the message of tangible corporate values generally reaches only one out of every three employees (Ligalux 2006).

Change depends on both internal cohesion and openness. When these conditions are less than perfect, only mediocre results can be achieved – even with the best of methods. This is why the first challenge for many executives is to face the facts: a large proportion of employees channel their energies – if at all – in a direction other than that intended by the strategic planning (Kohtes and Rossmann 2006). Change management therefore means first re-establishing a core identity as a credible point of reference. This offers the stability the company needs to undertake change, without robbing it of the flexibility to adapt to varying challenges. This internal alignment cannot function under pressure: if the base resists change, the process will inevitably get bogged down.

Get the current flowing again

Dismantling such an impasse requires reflection on the strengths of a company and its employees. When management is able to get everyone on board, navigation becomes much easier – even in rough seas. True commitment is most likely to develop where true contact takes place and managers do not view their employees as mere subordinates, but as partners to be taken seriously (Buss 2007).

For years, Porsche has successfully demonstrated how a company can persuade not only investors, but also its own employees, despite often problematic market developments. When Porsche boss Wendelin
Wiedeking repeatedly emphasises that employees are among the carmaker’s top priorities, this means more than the empty words we are accustomed to hearing. With job guarantees and profit-sharing concepts, the management has demonstrated that change – for many companies, a term synonymous with redundancies or wage cuts – can also be to the advantage of all concerned.

In fact, employee benefits and securities alone are often not even the main source of corporate unity. To flow vigorously, a wellspring needs substantial groundwater to draw on. And a powerful corporate vision shared by all employees and filled with life is a far greater source of impetus than the usual incentive systems – which have been proven to have scant motivating effect anyway. For this reason, companies and organisations must ask themselves a number of key questions. What do we do especially well? Where do we want to go? And what really excites us? At Porsche, the answers read like this:

Porsche doesn’t just build sports cars. Porsche is more. Much more. We love to carry engineering to the extremes. And thereby cut exceptional paths. Our own. Our people are important to us. They sometimes think outside the box. But, above all, they think – creatively and cooperatively. We are constantly in motion. True, we’re small – but the Porsche Principle knows no limits. (Porsche 2007)

This is not only a strong vision, but also a set of guidelines for enabling change management.

A key question in this context is “What does the company offer its employees and what does the company expect from them?” After all, a genuine spirit of change can only develop when there is a harmonious relationship between give and take. Some management executives shy away from real transparency in company developments, and keep unpleasant facts a secret for as long as possible. But when businesses finally feel forced to cut a large number of jobs, due to stagnating sales (or in some cases, despite gigantic profits), this is often viewed by the workforce as a lack of honesty. Employees feel demoted to stand-in roles in a change process over which they have no influence. This situation sends negative signals far beyond any individual decision: when managers give the impression that the workforce must passively accept events, employees will remain passive when the next change project arises.

Of course, sometimes it is the employees who reduce themselves to the role of a small cog in a large machine. Those who perceive themselves in this way miss the opportunity to become part of the big picture. It helps if they see work not just as a job or a burden, but as a calling in life. Their ambitions are part of what keeps the river flowing, and everyone – em-
Successful change management is mainly a matter of letting it happen
employees and managers alike – must ask themselves from time to time: “Am I still in the right place, with the right company?”

Find your identity and change it constantly

The spirit of change mentioned above cannot be brought about at the push of a button. Like a young plant, it must be watered and perhaps trimmed back from time to time in order to thrive. Classic characteristics such as reliability and courage, independence and passion are the seeds from which the most beautiful flowers grow. However, managers sometimes lose sight of these values, and view change processes as isolated projects to be implemented. They forget that there can be no plant without seeds. Even the best strategies or measures can do little to change this.

Hence, just as a tree doesn’t grow in the space of a few days, a company does not become ready for change overnight. Siemens employees, if asked what they think of the change processes implemented in recent years, would likely give different answers from one location to the next. Some business units are still struggling with the latest restructuring measures or fearing further reorganisation, while others are dealing extremely well with change. For example, Siemens Manager Josef Roehrle successfully led the Erlangen electronics plant out of the crisis that it endured in the nineties. Since he took over factory management in 1993, there have been no more redundancies. Change processes are still on the agenda in Erlangen, but Roehrle has created a solid foundation for this: a culture that is created by the people and which therefore takes their needs into account. His principle: no small cogs in a big wheel, but a factory family that has developed over the years (Pletter 2007). For managers, this means not hiding behind methods and projects but dealing with real people and real situations.

Change is a normal occurrence, not an anomaly. However, the very existence of change management shows that this is not accepted in many companies. Those who expect change as part of “business as usual” will find it considerably easier to keep an organisation flowing. A river does not work on a stop-and-go basis – it is in constant motion. If not, it is either jammed or has dried up. But how can this perspective be achieved in practice? Ideas management has placed many companies on the right path. The term itself is part of the solution: whereas change management often generates concerns associated with the need for change, ideas management achieves exactly the opposite. It calls for creativity and design, for involvement and improvement. This is actually how change processes should always be. Recent studies show what potential lies in this shift in
perspective. Some sectors are already achieving an employee participation rate of over 40 percent in their ideas management. These changes at the heart of the company easily develop their own natural flow – because they are desired and because their significance is made clear. A positive side effect: the cost-savings potential is huge and even makes other change projects that are working towards the same goal redundant. Deutsche Post AG saved 271 million euros in 2006 thanks to employee suggestions for improvement (Deutsches Institut für Betriebswirtschaft 2007).

Less method, more personality

The route to natural change leads from holding on to power to letting things happen. Just as you cannot tell a river where to flow to, it is also better to give goals as wide a scope as possible in business. Based on this openness, the challenges that arise in each moment can be taken on immediately. Change occurs instead of being initiated by force. But is this a realistic approach?

Google became the global market leader in the online advertising business using exactly this principle. The search engine provider’s management leaves its employees to their own devices for ten percent of their working time. During this time, they pursue whatever they consider important. This is exactly how most new Google services are created: they are not planned on the drawing board and no change management is required in order to implement them because they are part of a comprehensive flow principle. Or take Apple. Its days as a company that survived by producing computer hardware alone are long gone. MP3 players and other gadgets are now the main sales drivers at this hotbed of innovation. No change project was required to steer the corporate strategy in a new direction, because the company simply picked up the latest trends time and time again. Apple keeps its finger on the pulse of its market. The word “computer” has since disappeared from the company’s name – just like that, without further ado.

This approach to change is not exclusive to the IT sector with its particularly fast innovation cycles. If the corporate culture is right, it works in any context. In a culture of tolerating mistakes and encouraging exploration and discovery, the natural friends of change processes, yet without any explicit change management, Toyota has become the pioneer of environmentally-friendly hybrid motors. At the same time, German carmakers continue to resist the planned tightening of emission legislation, loathing the required modification to their technologies as a troublesome change process.
Successful change management is mainly a matter of letting it happen. As the examples show, the less you stand in the way of change, the easier it is to implement. However, this view is an enormous challenge for many managers as it means bidding farewell to the illusion of always having (and always needing to have) things under control. In Taoism, this perspective is called Wu Wei, which essentially means taking action by taking no action. Managers who succeed in distancing themselves from the compulsion to achieve – static – perfection initially find themselves in the middle of nowhere, only to then discover that this opens up the opportunity to do anything. The following Zen story illustrates what is meant by this.

A Zen pupil went to his teacher and asked him: “Do I have to lose my way before I find my destination?” The teacher said: “Now that I no longer have a destination, I don’t lose my way any more.”

In a business context, this can be understood to mean that targets, not just in change projects, work best when they serve as signposts and do not anticipate the end result, which still lies ahead in the distance. If you view change management as an ongoing dialogue, you always move in step with current challenges and will thus overcome them. In this way, difficulties are not impediments, but rather markers for new directions. Just as a river uses its natural “intelligence” to find the best route, the smartest thing for a company to do is to adopt a more flexible approach to prevailing conditions.

The best way for managers to adopt this open stance is to give their own enthusiasm free rein. This requires self-assurance and the courage to accept the possibility of failure. As the Irish playwright Samuel Beckett once said: “Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.” The departure from the cure-all solution, which usually turns out to be less than a silver bullet in the final analysis anyway, opens up the possibility of achieving the best results offered by each situation.

This has less to do with laissez-faire than with identifying and taking advantage of the opportunities of the moment. When the former Daimler boss Jürgen Schrempp announced the Chrysler takeover, he effectively set off a fireworks display on the stock markets. However, ten years later, his successor Dieter Zetsche was applauded when he indicated that the days of the transatlantic merger could be numbered. What seems right today could be wrong tomorrow. This does not apply to a river. If the water comes up against an obstacle, it simply flows around it. Ideally, daily business life functions according to exactly the same principle. When E.ON finally threw in the towel after more than a year of fighting to take over the energy group Endesa, this did not constitute a failure. Instead, it marked a breakthrough in finding a solution that was far more appropriate for the current conditions.