

## INTRODUCTION: CHANGE BEHAVIOURS, GET CULTURE

This is a real story. Andrew X was the CEO of a flagship company. Still in his forties, he was young for a CEO. He had been headhunted from a different industry sector and had arrived at the pharmaceutical company with a reputation for past achievements. Though he was friendly - to a point - he wasn't the type of guy to hang around the executive floor having informal conversations with corporate officers and staff. He meant business. He was busy. He was always busy.

He was replacing Dr Peter Y who, at 55, had taken an early retirement. Peter had been at the helm for more than fifteen years and used to be a 'young CEO' as well. But industry

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turmoil, failed acquisitions and a weak research and product development machinery had taken the company into very unsettled times. The Board decided that a fresh approach was needed. They found Andrew with a track record of ‘results’ in a meteoric career and they sent Peter to play golf with a generous pension scheme.

I met Andrew several times after he arrived. He seemed to have clear ideas about the need for a lean business and for cutting unnecessary fat and waste. And that ‘fat and waste’ could include anything from travelling in business class to ‘big supporting functions’ and ‘that bad habit of breakfast meetings in the cafeteria’.

For his VPs on the exec floor and their immediate staff in headquarters, what was most noticeable about Andrew wasn’t his speeches about strategy or his apparent appetite for asking people who used to have one job now to do three and earn the same as before. The most noticeable thing about Andrew was how different from Peter he was. As simple as that. From his very first weeks on the tenth floor, whenever I approached any of his senior VPs direct reports and asked, “*How is it going?*” the answer would be, “*different, very different*”. As if all those PhDs, MBAs, MDs, senior heads of R&D, Finance, Operations, International Marketing, etc., were suddenly short of vocabulary and could not articulate it any better than that. ‘Very different’. Here are some of those differences:

- # The old CEO, Dr Peter Y, loved inclusive meetings and presentations with lots of PowerPoint slides and ‘progress reviews’ and an average audience of 30. Andrew performed on a one-on-one basis (“*If I need something, I’ll come to you*”) and rarely called

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meetings (*“Having an executive committee once a month is more than enough, don’t you think?”*)

# Dr Peter Y was an ‘email distributor’. He loved email communications in its neatly structured way with lots of people in the ‘cc’ box (*“Let’s make sure that everybody in my circle gets as much information as I do”*). Andrew’s email was short-and-sharp without many greetings and polite endings. No ‘Dear John’ or ‘Dear Mary’, or sincerely or kind regards. Just: *“Need to have that plan for Wednesday now Tuesday evening would be great please send to Barbara, tx A”*. And that would be a long one.

# Dr Peter Y was a visiting, apostolic CEO. In the early days, when the company had a corporate jet, he would travel extensively that way. Most recently, a more modest first class in a commercial airline would take him to the affiliates worldwide for ‘review meetings’. Andrew wasn’t averse to travelling but, apparently, this was not his favourite way of managing internationally. He was very fond of teleconferences. Video conferences were another ‘waste’ for him.

To be fair, it wasn’t that extraordinarily hard for the VPs to adapt. Andrew wasn’t particularly difficult, or nasty, or unfriendly, nor did he make their life miserable. Andrew was, hey, ‘different’.

Five months after Andrew’s arrival, a series of anecdotal observations were made by middle managers in the IT department, the International Marketing group and the in-house travel agency (the latter having miraculously survived

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an outsourcing attempt). When all these observations were put together, the facts were solid and unquestionable:

- # Overall email traffic 'at the centre' (the official jargon for headquarters) had decreased by 25%
- # Total number of meetings had decreased by 30%
- # Travel budget was within budget for the first time since, well, since there was a travel budget.

At that time, I didn't spend much time at their premises but, intrigued by these figures - 'compiled' by a data hungry, clever summer intern doing an MBA project - I tried to find opportunities to discuss them with senior, and not so senior people, sometimes in passing, sometimes as a topic of conversation on the back of my totally unrelated consulting project. What I got back sounded as follows:

≈ Andrew has made it very clear that we should be more agile and fast and that there was a bit of a waste in the way we were doing things. Nothing wrong, but, hey, new times!

≈ He wants straight, simple communications. We were a cosy-cosy family, I suppose. Now we are learning fast to involve only those who need to be involved, you know, the 'on-a-need-to-know-basis' that Andrew preaches. And frankly, it's great.

≈ We were travelling a lot, too much. This new environment is great. I welcome it. We can do lots of things on the phone. Sometimes one tends to forget.

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⌘ We are certainly in big culture change mode, far more entrepreneurial, more ‘fit for purpose’ as Andrew likes to say. He wants less meetings and more work done! And he is right! And we’ve got rid of the practice of monthly reports. To the relief of my troops, I must say! He says he doesn’t need them.

One evening, Andrew and I were invited to the same social event. He was unusually chatty and towards the end we found ourselves in an animated private conversation:

- What a big cultural change you are driving, Andrew, I said.
- What do you mean?
- Well, all these, how should we call it, streamlined processes...
- Yes, we needed to simplify the budget process.
- I was talking more about the emails, and the number of meetings and...
- What emails?
- Well, IT has put together some figures and claim that email traffic has gone down by 25 %.
- Why? Do we have a problem? I thought we had just upgraded our servers?

At that point, I was beginning to look uncomfortable and I was wondering if he was trying to take me for a ride. So I tried:

- Andrew, seriously, are you kidding me? (Actually, I used different words). This young guy from the business school, summer intern, is writing a dissertation and has compiled what he calls

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‘efficiency statistics’ for the period since you arrived. And they included email traffic ‘at the centre’ down by 25%, total number of meetings decreased by 30% and, incidentally, within budget in travel expenditure. And surely you must take credit for these efficiency targets. I have seen a draft of the dissertation and you figure there as a case study under the title *A case of fast cultural change by the introduction of key efficiency measures: the role of transformational leadership.*

Andrew looked at me in a strange way: eye contact but semi-catatonic face, surprised, uneasy, solemn. Then, a few seconds of silence that felt like minutes. Suddenly, he changed and smiled a lot as if everything had been revealed in the way those hidden cameras show in TV programmes where people have been tricked big time, only to finally realize that they’d been set up by their best friend.

- Right! Nice! But I don’t really know what you are talking about.

I had to take over the conversation flow of that evening - I thought - or we would both go home with a strange embarrassment and a feeling that it was too much chardonnay after all.

- Are you telling me, I said, that you have not orchestrated these changes? That you haven’t issued guidelines on the need to have less meetings, sharper conversations, less dependence on email pollution and cutting down on travelling?

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This is what your people are telling me, and, by the way, they are delighted.

- Well, I am glad they are, but I haven't done anything!
- What about email traffic?
- What about it?
- The reduction across the board.
- I don't like emails; I think they are an excuse for recording everything 'just in case'. But I haven't said to anybody that we should use less email because I appreciate that this is a bit personal and many people are used to this way of communicating. I just don't want my inbox full at seven o'clock in the morning! But I am not in the business of dictating how many emails should land in somebody else's inbox. Do you think I am such a control freak?
- But your people say that you don't even reply to many emails...
- I don't reply to any email in which I am 'cc', that's for sure, let alone bcc, but I haven't asked others to 'follow me'. Quite frankly, I hope they will find better things to follow me upon!
- They said that when you presented the 'only-on-a-need-to-know' philosophy...
- I have never presented such a thing. I hate the term. How can I know what others need to know? Isn't it a bit of an arrogant view of the world?
- Travel budget is under-spent...
- Good! My fault as well?
- They said you have strong views about how abusive travel had become in the organization and that it wasn't acceptable.

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- I seem to remember that at an early Exec Committee I mentioned that, in my previous job, I had felt ‘abused’ by having to travel too much, particularly on week-ends, and that many discussions don’t need the five or more hours on a plane. But I had not discussed travel policy with anybody. I don’t think it is appropriate to travel business class for a couple of hours’ flight. I personally would travel economy in those cases! But I am not aware that we have formally reviewed travel policy. Now that you mention it, perhaps we should...
- Well, you seem to have a new one! What people seem to be most grateful for is for what they see as your personal efforts to cut meeting time. I know that in the previous regime they spent their day in meetings: corporate, international, project management, finance, reviews, you name it.
- I am not a meeting person...
- They figured that out now.
- But we have never discussed in the monthly executive committee anything about ‘less meetings’. In my first senior manager job, many years ago, management imposed upon us an initiative of ‘no meetings on Friday’ and a target of reduction of meetings across the board by one third. I thought it was a stupid idea. There are things that need meetings and things that don’t. In my position I want to believe, perhaps with some arrogance, that I don’t have to be involved in endless reviews on the security of our warehouses or the pre-pre-pre Marketing plans, or the agenda arrangements for the launch of a product! I hate

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that waste! But I hope that those involved in those topics meet as much or as little as they need to have secure warehouses, good marketing plans and a b...y good product launch!

- There are no monthly reports anymore...
- Why?
- Because you don't want them.
- I don't need them! Other managers may...
- You have launched an efficient mini-reengineering initiative by amalgamating jobs...
- Give me a break! We had four HR VPs in the country, one for each of the sites. I asked to have one, and challenged them to convince me on the need for four. Nobody has. If this is *reengineering*, so be it. I call it common sense! I also happen to believe that we have an IT department capable, in numbers, of controlling a space shuttle launch but with too many chiefs and no Indians who can fix my laptop! But this is another conversation.
- Ok, but, wait a minute, this is not only your people. I still remember our early conversations. You despised 'breakfast meetings' ...
- I can't do business and eat breakfast. Is that a problem?
- You told me it was a bad habit.
- Being half European, I see breakfast meetings as a bad American export. So, if I share this with you, are you going to stop having business discussions over breakfast?
- I am not on your payroll, otherwise I might, I continued. So none of this has been Machiavellically orchestrated and skilfully crafted

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from your tenth floor office? People think that you have a sort of supreme gift for pulling strings and expressing yourself with clarity about what is expected and that there is a significant cultural change programme of some sort going on. A senior person reporting to you used the term 'crusade'. That MBA guy thinks you are a transformational leader injecting strong efficiency measures. And you are telling me that you were not aware of this?

- Look, I very much welcome all the good things happening. We are lucky if all this is true, I mean, the rational improvements etc. But I am not Machiavelli. My name is Andrew and what I am really, really good at is...
- Don't tell me, teamwork and organizational re-engineering, I said, pushing my luck.
- Investor relationships. Yes, I did enjoy the City of London when I was in Europe and now Wall Street. I have many venture capital friends. I talk to them. I am close to them. And, let me tell you, this is a big change for this company. In the previous regime, as you called it, they used to ask junior people to prepare some PowerPoint slides and send those to them. They felt treated badly. And we paid for it! This is my forte. Once I get this done as a priority, I will start thinking about changes that perhaps I need to make in the organization. Do you fancy another drink?

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### >> ACCIDENTAL TRANSFORMATION

Andrew the CEO may not have been a transformational leader, but the organization had been transformed in only a couple of months. One year, later most of the changes - plus others that followed as a natural consequence of these - were still in place. Many other 'efficiency measures' were still working. The copy-writers of that year's Annual Report drafted things such as:

- # 'We have focused on efficiencies across the board'
- # 'Become a fast and agile organization'
- # 'Rational approach to communication between sites'
- # 'Concerted focus on controlling operating expenses'
- # 'New entrepreneurial spirit'
- # 'Significant cultural change and a new north'

and, of course:

- # 'Far better relationships with investors!'

Let's not take this lightly. If you work or have worked in an organization with high levels of information pollution, emailitis and 'reply-all pandemic', non-stop 9-to-5 meetings, Outlook calendars with no blank spaces until 2023, weekly, monthly and quarterly reports and pervasive bureaucracy, and if for just one second you could imagine an organization exactly the opposite, you would feel an immense relief just by the simple use of your imagination and visualization of this utopia! You, citizen of Average Company - or manager, CEO, business leader, HR professional, organizational consultant, etc. - know what I am talking about.

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Cultural changes and broad organizational changes are very often discussed (and taught in business education) with a long list of caveats including: 'make sure that the change is not transitory, that it is not superficial'. Agreed. And - from people who always *know*- 'it's going to be long, painful, and massive'. Also, for many of those people, only Big Planned Changes are real change. For some reason, changes in Andrew's organization became pretty 'stable'. He didn't plan much in the first months, although later on in his tenure he formalized some specific changes. And as for having to be long and painful... Does it have to be? It didn't happen in Andrew's company.

The problem is that our stereotypes of 'management of change' or 'cultural change' usually include experiences or images of extremely complicated systems mapped on big flipcharts and encapsulated in a myriad of PowerPoints and Post-its, the content and philosophy of which seems to desperately be trying to emulate quantum physics.

### >> VIRAL CHANGE: INFECTIONS IN THE ORGANIZATION'S PLAYGROUND

This book presents an approach to management of change - including 'cultural change'- that includes the concerted use of some of the mechanisms present in Andrew's accidental change management programme: the one that never was, but that de facto created a new culture. Some of these

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mechanisms have labels such as imitation, diffusion of new practices, reinforcement of new behaviours, creation of ‘tipping points, ‘language frames’ and others.

In Andrew’s case, a cascade of assumptions, imitations, triggers, etc., created a snowball effect. Perhaps the changes were ‘desired’ by many. Perhaps they were ready. I don’t know. Andrew’s vignette is a showcase of some of those powerful mechanisms. The key is to move from ‘accidental’ to ‘orchestrated’....

In other words, I am not suggesting for a second that we leave the spread and development of change to the kind of uncontrolled cascading down of the behaviour of a single person at the top. Or that we rely on that kind of role model to be mirrored across the organization. This would be naïve to say the least. But we can’t ignore the power of influence (which is different from the power of authority) and, in particular, mutual influence between individuals within the organization. Engineered and distributed influence is a key engine of change, one that this book will have at its core.

Beyond those labels described before, which I will explain later in the book, the messages that I’d like to leave are clear and simple:

- # You can do it!
- # It’s not about a massive deployment of a legion of external consultants.
- # It’s not about an incredibly long and massive ‘exercise’.
- # It doesn’t have to be painful, although people tend to make it so.

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I am going to take you through it.

I call this approach **VIRAL CHANGE**. It is based upon the combination of mechanisms that have been ‘discovered’ over many years and that blend traditional Behavioural Sciences with more modern Social Sciences and recent Network Sciences.

**VIRAL CHANGE** is unconventional. It sees and creates the diffusion of new ideas, new processes, new behaviours and changes within the organization like ‘infections in the corporate playground’. And **VIRAL CHANGE** achieves more than massive communication programmes with dozens of Town Hall meetings.

In **VIRAL CHANGE** mode, ‘change management’ effectively means the orchestrated creation of an internal epidemic of success. I am not in the business of telling you what your success has to look like. You define that.

To achieve this, you don’t need the step-by-step, sequential, orderly processes mapped and sold by many consultants and academic gurus with a multi-million dollar price tag.

I am going to redefine your business! You - (change) manager, CEO, HR partner, consultant, project leader or organizational-development-transformation-rethinking-renewal-leader - need to get into the infectious disease business, even if you didn’t

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know it, and epidemiology wasn't in your business education curriculum.

### >> MAKING SUCCESS FASHIONABLE

VIRAL CHANGE is about contagious behaviours that spread. Perhaps a bit slowly at the beginning (or at least it may look like that) but then they suddenly seem to reach a tipping point and become 'the norm'. And this can be achieved with a relatively small number of behaviours. It's also about specific networks of an also relatively small number of individuals, carrying the infection and creating the fashion. Fashions and infections have many things in common. After all, fashion is the infection of ideas or habits.

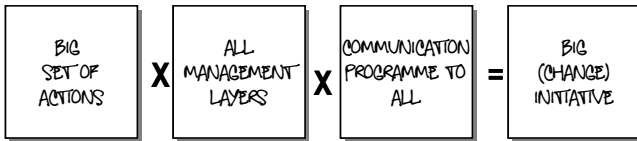
I believe that real, successful management of change is not about preaching change, the need for change, the importance of change and the consequences of not changing. It is not about massive communication and training programmes. It is not about 'cascaded-down' management retreats to engage absolutely everybody on earth. Behind VIRAL CHANGE is a fundamentally different way of understanding, not only how organizations work but also how change is induced and made sustainable. Schematically, the differences are articulated in the graph on page 16.

### >> NEW IDEAS ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

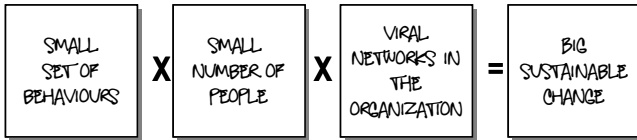
As it often happens with the historical development of many disciplines, they sometimes tend to go their own way without

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## TRADITIONAL APPROACH TO MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE



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talking to each other. The current business world is a good example. It sometimes looks like isolated, tribal silos talking to themselves. HR people go to HR conferences. IT people to IT conferences. R&D people to whatever techie conferences they need to go, etc. You won't find these tribes mixed up other than at internal-company-jamborees.

Also, social sciences in general don't get serious air time in corporate life. If anything, it sounds like 'HR stuff', which provides an immediate alibi for management and leadership to 'devolve the initiative to the function'.

In recent years, we have seen a great deal of convergence of disciplines and approaches in areas that just a few decades ago were thought to be unrelated. Today, we know quite a lot about how the organization works. And we know that a key part of its functioning has to do with the internal fluid connections between people that could loosely be called internal networks. Many good things happen on those hidden highways, although

what we see is mostly what happens in visible structures such as teams and committees. But today we also know quite a lot about how networks work; any network, whether physical, electronic or human/social. This knowledge gives us a tremendous advantage in understanding not only how organizations work, but how to manage change.

A group of unlikely fellow travellers are coming together on a intriguing journey. Mathematics, biology, complexity theory, conventional social sciences, computer sciences, and socio-economics, for example, are becoming closer and closer as if in a new *philo-sophos* era. In today's world, the excuse 'I haven't been trained in those things' is no longer a valid one!

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What we can learn and apply to the management and leadership of organizations and 'management of change' is simply fascinating. **VIRAL CHANGE** firmly borrows from those convergent disciplines and applies a framework that creates fast, sustainable change.

### >> THE PILLARS OF VIRAL CHANGE

#### (1) THE ONLY REAL CHANGE IS BEHAVIOURAL

There is no 'change' in the organization until there is behavioural change in the individuals; no matter how many new processes and systems or new enabling technologies have been mapped and 'implemented'. Your wall may be full of post-its of new processes, the new IT system may be launched or the new re-organization declared live, but if people continue with their 'old ways of doing', you will be kidding yourself by calling that change. And what's more: intellectually, your people may get it! Emotionally, they may or may not get it. But even if they do, there is still no guarantee that behaviours will change, that change will occur.

#### (2) BEHAVIOURS CHANGE CULTURE, NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND

Example 1: There is no such a thing as 'an entrepreneurial culture'. There are cultures where people behave in a manner of A, B, C, obtaining an organizational benefit of X, Y, Z and a personal gain of 1, 2, 3. When all these things happen, we have habits, routines, norms, ways of doing things, etc., that we can call entrepreneurial (or we can have a debate about a better term!).

Example 2: Do you want 'a culture of accountability'? You can preach the importance of accountability, describe to people the advantages of accountability (personal and organizational), communicate the risk of lack of

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accountability, train them with packages describing the five components of accountability, produce posters, stickers and mugs with the slogan 'we need to be accountable', go to the country-house hotel and repeat that message times twenty, and then pray. Or you can define specific, visible behaviours of individuals that when (a) seen, (b) practiced and (c) properly reinforced, will create habits and ways of doing which you would be happy to describe as 'showing accountability'. Then you'll have a culture with that label.

If you want cultural change with a label, define the behaviours needed, install them, make them live and sustainable and you'll get 'that culture'. Then, well, you can keep the original label or you may even find a better one!

Margaret Thatcher once declared: "*There's no such thing as society. There are only individual men and women and there are families*". You wouldn't expect less from the Iron Lady sitting on the right-hand side of the political arena where individualism is king and collectivism is bad for your health.

My temptation to steal the line is strong. Here it is: in the organization, forget the culture, there are only behaviours. These are accepted or unaccepted, expected or unexpected, sanctioned or not. There are established ways of doing things, ways of talking, ways of thinking and ways of gluing people. There are also visible windows to the world such as logos, colours, objects, symbols and other paraphernalia usually called 'artefacts' by scholars. But, above all, there are people - single, in pairs, in trios, in groups, in teams, in networks and any other multiples - who *do* and *don't do* things. This is as

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visible as it can get: how people behave in a particular environment. And this *is* culture.

**(3) ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE, INCLUDING CULTURAL CHANGE, IS NOT A LONG-TERM AFFAIR**

You can change culture ‘now’ and see results in a few months. Andrew’s organization was progressively transforming itself in significant terms and with visible and measurable outcomes as early as four months after some *mechanisms* were in place in that otherwise accidental ‘programme’. These changes were not short-term, ephemeral, so called ‘win-wins’. They lasted beyond his first and second year and created a platform for many others.

For many business people, changing culture is a far away utopia. All very well in terms of ‘cultural change’, they say, but we have needs now: the strategic plan, the business plan, and then Christmas, and then the New Year, and, incidentally, a January full of conferences! We’ll focus on these short-term things for now. Cultural change is a long-term initiative; we’ll tackle this as soon as we can. Unless the sky has fallen down, there will always be a winner between this year’s business plan actions to implement and ‘the culture thing’. And you know what? The winner always looks like a spreadsheet.

**(4) A FEW ‘HOT POINTS’ ARE THE KEY TO FOCUS THE ENERGY UPON**

Long-term, fast and sustainable change in organizations can be achieved by putting energy and effort into some ‘hot points’, not by pouring them into a massive, across the board declaration of intentions, involving all processes and systems; colossal communication programmes or, above all, exquisite planning to predict what exactly will be happening at well-defined points in time.

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Andrew's changes were achieved via a (invisible and initially un-planned) 'programme' which contained no Town Hall meeting, no road shows, no corporate communication projects and no country-house retreats to 'explain', 'motivate', 'engage' and 'empower' employees. A few 'measures' plus a great deal of imitation, assumptions about what the boss would like to see and presumably reward, had the power to snowball changes. What happened in Andrew's company during his initial months as CEO wasn't trivial. Yet, it didn't come from a six-month assessment period and a two-year change management programme. If only we could learn from these dynamics!

### >> FIRST KEYWORD: IT'S BEHAVIOURS, STUPID

Let me go back to behaviours. This is at the core of **VIRAL CHANGE** because the infection must be mainly behavioural! It could not be otherwise: we have just said that unless behaviours change, there is no proper change!

Actually, I don't agree with Thatcher. I do believe that there is such a thing as society and that this collective entity matters. But I would agree that 'society' as a concept, important as it may be, has limited operational value. To put it bluntly, I don't know what to do with 'society', while I do know a lot about 'the individual men and women' and those little groups called 'families'. People, institutions, the government, etc. give money or take money away from individuals, and create laws to protect or punish them. In doing so, they are framing and shaping 'the society thing'. But all this is done because of the individual or their groupings. The shape of 'society', whatever that may be, is depending on all those things that we do or don't do with individuals and their natural (family) and artificial (company, institution) groupings.

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Thatcher's point was that society can only be described in terms of its components. My copycat point is that while culture in an organization can be described in many terms, many of them serve as artefacts (logos, buildings) while others are labels that have great difficulty in achieving any degree of reliability. In plain words, labels such as 'entrepreneurial culture', or 'mature culture', or 'culture of fear', or 'high trust culture', mean next to nothing until you start describing what you mean, which usually happens in the corridor and the cafeteria!

These things mean different things to you and me. And as soon as you start to seriously describe and articulate them, you are bound to describe what people do or don't do, what they are or aren't allowed to do, which behaviours are established, which ones are non-negotiable, which behaviours would take you places and which ones would take you nowhere. You will progressively be talking about behaviours.

The only cultural parameters that really count as far as being able to do something about/with them are the behaviours of the individuals or groupings that exist within such a thing as 'the culture of the organization'.

I can hear people saying: "*Wait a minute; this sounds a bit like a reductionism approach. What about norms, beliefs, attitudes, values, hopes, expectations, emotions?*" Yes, of course the culture also has norms, many of them tacit. But norms are the mirrors for behaviours. Yes, people in that culture also have attitudes, beliefs, values, hopes, expectations, emotions and all that. I agree. The problem is

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that, if you push me, I would declare all of those to be pretty intangible, compared to what I can (or cannot) see people doing or not doing, i.e. their behaviours.

I am stretching the argument here on purpose and taking a pretty fundamentalist psychological position called behaviourism. For many folks in and out of the psychological and social sciences world, behaviourism is a sort of Thatcherism of psychology and, as in politics, not everybody's cup of tea. We could spend hours on this very interesting discussion within the social sciences arena and that would be great. But, if you are like me, a business practitioner, the reality is that we would need concrete things to work with. Many of the reasons why people take a rather cynical approach to mission statements and declarations of values is because they are full of non-operational concepts, apparently all of them designed to make it impossible to disagree with. If your value statement contains a list of words such as integrity, honesty, creativity, trust, pro-activity and customer focus, you are at the top of the bell curve. The question is: "*What does all that mean?*" Yes, sometimes there are explanations, but, incidentally, rarely at the behavioural level. What is it that people have to do or not do around here to be called honest? What behaviours are acceptable or unacceptable under 'integrity'? What does trust mean? And so on.

Behaviours are actionable, values are not. Behaviours-only with no reference to values is like bits of information in the computer that only make sense when you put them together. Values-only with no reference to behaviours just implies naked labels open to an attitude of pick-your-own interpretation. Culture of an organization defined in values-only mode is nice, but not actionable. Culture defined in terms

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of behaviours may not have the glamour of many grandiose value statements but provides clear frameworks and boundaries for people, with the advantage that (a) you can always refer to a value system in the background and (b) we know a lot about the 'social life of behaviours – how they are formed, why they fade, how we can make them stick, how they can create environments.

In VIRAL CHANGE we don't dismiss the importance of values and beliefs and the lexicon around attitudes, qualities, mindset and other 'intangibles'. But VIRAL CHANGE works with behaviours. It is up to you, to us, to translate any intangible into its behavioural reality. That's why VIRAL CHANGE is behavioural change.

>> SECOND KEYWORD: CHANGE.  
15 ASSUMPTIONS TO CHALLENGE

This book would like to help any manager and leader working in any organization - large or small, in the private or public sector - to explore, understand, digest and embrace some counter-intuitive ways of dealing with 'change'.

I am using the word 'change' in a broad sense because - unless you have been in a corporate coma for a while - you would agree right from the start that change is constant in any organization.

To a great extent, one of the two words in the expression 'change

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management' is actually redundant.  
Change Management is management or it is  
not management at all.

But you and I are also aware that people often give the label 'change management' or 'management of change' to a formal process or series of processes that try to get the organization from A to B. There is a myriad of books on the topic, there is formal training at business schools, scholarly literature, management gurus specialized in this, countless consulting services, etc. Last time I Googled 'change management', it showed me more than 27 million entries; 9 million if you narrow it down to 'organization'.

If you are – or have been - involved in any of these 'change-labelled processes' - either as top leader, manager, HR practitioner or part of Organizational Development - you will have been exposed to a lot of the above. This build-up of interest and specialization has inevitably created lots of assumptions about 'how change works'. Many of them have become dogma, and many of them are simply myths.

Throughout this book and through the glasses of VIRAL CHANGE, we will address these frequent assumptions:

- 1 BIG CHANGE REQUIRES BIG ACTIONS
- 2 ONLY CHANGE AT THE TOP CAN ENSURE CHANGE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION
- 3 PEOPLE ARE RESISTANT TO CHANGE
- 4 CULTURAL CHANGE IS A SLOW AND PAINFUL LONG-TERM AFFAIR

## VIRAL CHANGE

- 5 EVERYBODY NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE CHANGE
- 6 COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING ARE THE VITAL COMPONENTS OF CHANGE
- 7 NEW PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS WILL CREATE THE NEW NECESSARY BEHAVIOURS
- 8 PEOPLE ARE RATIONAL AND WILL REACT TO LOGICAL AND RATIONAL REQUESTS FOR CHANGE
- 9 THERE IS NO POINT IN CREATING CHANGE IN ONE DIVISION WITHOUT THE REST OF THE COMPANY PARTICIPATING
- 10 SCEPTICAL PEOPLE AND ENEMIES OF CHANGE NEED TO BE SIDELINED
- 11 VISION FOR CHANGE NEEDS TO COME FROM THE TOP AND CASCADE DOWN
- 12 AFTER CHANGE, YOU NEED A PERIOD OF STABILITY AND CONSOLIDATION
- 13 SHORT-TERM WINS ARE TACTICAL BUT THEY DO NOT USUALLY REPRESENT REAL CHANGE
- 14 THERE WILL ALWAYS BE CASUALTIES - PEOPLE NOT ACCEPTING CHANGE - AND YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY AND DEAL WITH THEM
- 15 PEOPLE USED TO NOT COMPLYING WITH NORMS WILL BE EVEN WORSE AT ACCEPTING CHANGE

## CHANGE BEHAVIOURS, GET CULTURE

I'd like to make a suggestion before you read the rest of the book. Take a few minutes and try to establish your position on these 15 assumptions. At the end of this introduction you can write down what you think of them and whether you agree or disagree. And above all, if you can, write down an example from your own organizational life or experience that supports or challenges the assumption. When you have finished the book, I would like to ask you to go back to these, your initial notes and see if your position has changed in one way or another. That would be the greatest measure on how this book will have helped you!

### >> READING THIS BOOK

The first five chapters of this book lay the foundations for the practicalities of **VIRAL CHANGE**.

Chapter 1 explores the often confusing world of 'change management' or 'management of change'. In this world, the language of change is used in ways that suit practitioners, and it represents different, not always well-defined angles and approaches. A bit of terminology clean-up is necessary in order to understand how to create change.

In Chapter 2, I share why, in my view, many 'change management' initiatives fail. The track record of programmes created under such a label is unimpressive. We think we know why. You'll also see why **VIRAL CHANGE** is such an attractive alternative.

Chapters 3 and 4 open the curtains of the organization to understand what's going on inside! Any approach to change

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has a ‘model of the organization’ behind it. We all have conventional and traditional views on ‘how the organization works’. Our view of change is a logical consequence of these views. However, we have recently accumulated a great deal of knowledge about ‘organizational life’ that challenges conventional wisdom. Discovering this fascinating world is the pre-requisite to creating and managing change.

Chapter 5 puts all the insights together and articulates the significant differences between the traditional view -, still the backbone of most academic and consulting frameworks - and **VIRAL CHANGE**.

I have grouped all the above chapters under the heading ‘In theory for the pragmatists’ because many so-called ‘practitioners’ rush into the application of off-the-shelf processes, systems and templates (including downloadable ones from the internet) without a proper understanding of the fabric of the organization. Those ‘pragmatists’ could do with a bit of re-thinking of what we really know about organizational life. The following chapters are grouped under the heading ‘In practice for the theorists’, because they take **VIRAL CHANGE** to the real life implementations. Inversely here, people with affinity to conceptual frameworks, could well do with ‘some action’!

This second section deals with the four components of **VIRAL CHANGE**: language (chapter 6), new behaviours (chapters 7, 8 and 9), creation of tipping points (chapters 10, 11 and 12) and rules and routines (chapter 13).

**VIRAL CHANGE** has tremendous flexibility in its application. Different managers, leaders or change practitioners may apply it in somehow different ways. In chapter 14, the ‘process’ I

## CHANGE BEHAVIOURS, GET CULTURE

offer and discuss is far from dogmatic but represents a good overview of my own experience in applying **VIRAL CHANGE**.

Chapter 15 revisits the 15 change management assumptions that I introduced here in the introduction, to see if, after reading and digesting this book, we are in need of qualifying or challenging them.

I finish with an epilogue on the role of labels such as ‘change’ or ‘culture’ in our day-to-day organizational life.

Come on, let’s go!

## VIRAL CHANGE

TAKE A FEW MINUTES. TRY TO ARTICULATE YOUR POSITION ON EACH OF THE ASSUMPTIONS. WRITE DOWN WHETHER YOU AGREE OR DISAGREE. IF YOU CAN, THINK OF AN EXAMPLE FROM YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE TO SUPPORT, QUALIFY OR CHALLENGE THE ASSUMPTIONS. WHEN YOU HAVE FINISHED THE BOOK, GO BACK TO YOUR INITIAL NOTES AND SEE HOW OR IF YOUR POSITION HAS CHANGED IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER.

## CHANGE BEHAVIOURS, GET CULTURE

15 POPULAR AND ESTABLISHED ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT MANAGEMENT OF CHANGE		
	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(1) BIG CHANGE REQUIRES BIG ACTIONS		
(2) ONLY CHANGE AT THE TOP CAN ENSURE CHANGE WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION		

## VIRAL CHANGE

	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(3) PEOPLE ARE RESISTANT TO CHANGE		
(4) CULTURAL CHANGE IS A SLOW AND PAINFUL LONG-TERM AFFAIR		

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	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(5) EVERYBODY NEEDS TO BE INVOLVED IN THE CHANGE		
(6) COMMUNICATION AND TRAINING ARE THE VITAL COMPONENTS OF CHANGE		

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	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(7) NEW PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS WILL CREATE THE NEW NECESSARY BEHAVIOURS		
(8) PEOPLE ARE RATIONAL AND WILL REACT TO LOGICAL AND RATIONAL REQUESTS FOR CHANGE		

## CHANGE BEHAVIOURS, GET CULTURE

	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(9) THERE IS NO POINT IN CREATING CHANGE IN ONE DIVISION WITHOUT THE REST OF THE COMPANY PARTICIPATING		
(10) SCEPTICAL PEOPLE AND ENEMIES OF CHANGE NEED TO BE SIDELINED		

## VIRAL CHANGE

	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(1) VISION FOR CHANGE NEEDS TO COME FROM THE TOP AND CASCADE DOWN		
(2) AFTER CHANGE, YOU NEED A PERIOD OF STABILITY AND CONSOLIDATION		

## CHANGE BEHAVIOURS, GET CULTURE

	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(13) SHORT-TERM WINS ARE TACTICAL, BUT THEY DO NOT USUALLY REPRESENT REAL CHANGE		
(14) THERE WILL ALWAYS BE CASUALTIES - PEOPLE NOT ACCEPTING CHANGE - AND YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY AND DEAL WITH THEM		

## VIRAL CHANGE

	YOUR POSITION	EXAMPLE FROM YOUR EXPERIENCE
(15) PEOPLE USED TO NOT COMPLYING WITH NORMS WILL BE EVEN WORSE AT ACCEPTING CHANGE		