

## 4 Aspects of change:

# Grip and orientation during crisis for individuals and groups

Change is avalanching down.  
Insecurity keeps us hostage.  
Let's cultivate the land before  
the seed. It is spring, so it might  
be just the right moment.



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Silvana Snay, Salzburg

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**T**he Corona Virus Pandemia causes a flood of information, a flood of patients, a flood of governmental measurements and restrictions for every-day life. It is not a single flood, rather there are constantly flood waves coming. It amounts to a severe emergent changing. The result is a state of emergency in many countries. There are positive effects palpable in some countries, others have not yet reached the peak. Measures are softened in some places and extended in others.

*It brings out the worst  
and the best in people.*

It effects the economy in an unimaginable and unpredictable extent. What can be said for sure is, that it effects every single organisation and every individual. However, the effects are different. Where some sectors are short of staff and do not know how to satisfy demand, others are condemned to do nothing. At home many are home-office workers, school teacher assistants, kindergarten pedagogues, parents, partners, housemen and wives, all at once. At work, health care staff are overwhelmed by patients though often stopped, since security clothes and products are missing, ventilating machines are too few. Farmers cannot harvest all the vegetable, running short of workers: they may have to watch it wither. While running at the limit, all these workers are condemned to helplessness.

It brings out the worst and the best in people. Shoppers treat service staff in supermarkets badly and fight for toilet paper. People gather on balconies and applause their service staff or play concerts to unite. Some people already feel and see the positive in the crisis, where others are pushed into depression by existential fear; and anything in between or both things at the same time, if not something completely different.

### Let's pause for a moment

Let's use this pause for questioning our abilities as individuals to deal with rapid, emergent change. Here are two basic thoughts: Firstly, "people do not resist change, but being changed."<sup>1</sup> Secondly, "people have tremendous experience dealing with change."

### Change from outside

Building on these two thoughts leads to the insight that, one, the Corona Virus Pandemia is a change coming from outside. The measurements of governments, however essential and reasonable they are, mean: "we are being changed." Companies and organisation are being changed. The leaders need to take decisions on how to respond. So, while leaders themselves "are being changed" employees and leaders on all levels of the organisations "are being changed" too. Resistance shows in different forms. In some people, by really resisting measures; in others by feeling insecurity, worries or fear to that extend, that it fills up their inner space, thoughts and feelings, leading to inertia or functioning like on autopilot.

<sup>1</sup> Beckhard; R. (1997) "Agent of Change: My Life, My Practice" Jossey Bass Business & Management Series

### On the other hand

Two, we all have experiences and abilities that come in useful in such a situation of change. Focus on all the changes people master going through school, vocational training, or different jobs. Alternative, consider all the change a new born goes through in the first 3-years of life, if not until being grown up. We have our own rhythm and coping strategies. If we focus on these abilities, and generally can agree, that they are there, we do not need to want to stop the change. We do not have a chance now, anyway. We then can use our energy in dealing with the change. The question that remains, is how can different rhythms and coping strategies be synchronized on a group level?

When a change emerges, we hardly make the space and time to become conscious about our abilities and what the change really means. Experience shows that people on all levels of the organisational hierarchy are familiar with the following or similar mechanisms: many often polarizing conversations with colleagues at the coffee machine, partners or good friends at home; sleepless nights or sport power programs. We authors reckon, it is best to leave things where they belong. This means preparing a good room with enough but not much time for an honest close-up.

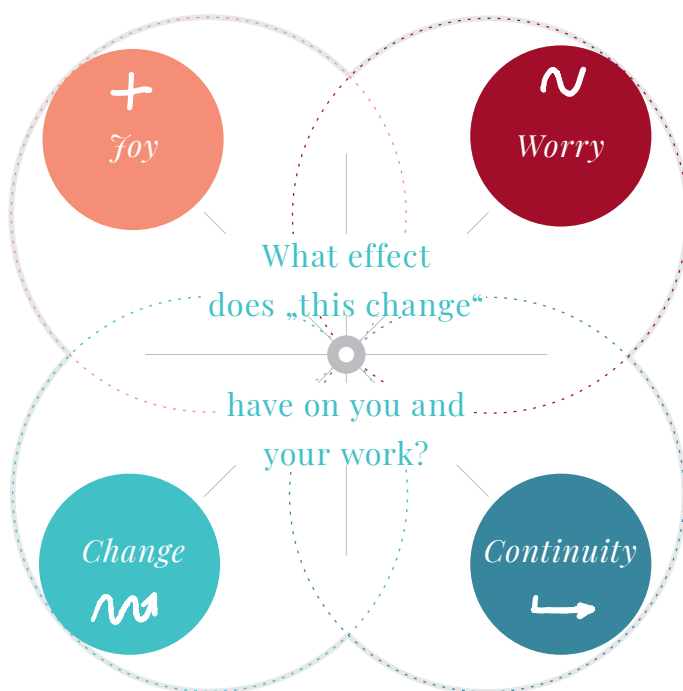
*How can different rhythms and coping strategies be synchronized on a group level?*

Photo by Linus Nylund on Unsplash

## A simple model with four aspects of change

This challenge nurtured Margit, already quite a few years back, to develop a simple model with 4 aspects of change and a process, that allows people to deal with a change concurrently building on and accepting different rhythms and strategies. The 4 aspects of change are joy, worry, change and continuity. The leading question for the exercise is "What effect does 'the change' have on you and your work?"

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joy, worry, change and continuity.  
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**Worry** means that people lose something: routines stop working. They do not know (yet) how to go forward. **Joy** means, that people win something: new possibilities emerge. They may feel excitement about the expected fruits of new ways of doing things. **Change** is about those things that really alter, whereas **continuity** is about what stays constant. Every change triggers all four aspects. It is just a matter of becoming aware. One theme may come up in different fields for one person. If the change comes sudden and is felt as severe, it is particularly grounding to focus on what remains stable.

This basic model can be used for individual work, where each person looks at a change that is currently affecting her. The process for this is relatively simple.

### Here is the description of 5 steps:

1. *Becoming aware of the information and facts of the change.*
2. *Filling in the 4 aspects.*
3. *Having another person interviewing oneself about the change and the 4 aspects.*
4. *The interviewer summarizing very briefly the essence of what he heard.*
5. *Becoming aware of how one feels towards the change comparing prior to after the exercise.*

Image 1:

### *Four aspects of change*

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The hypothesis lying behind these 4 aspects is, that every change triggers all four aspects. It is just a matter of becoming aware. The amount and combination of themes for the four aspects may vary from person to person. Even one theme may come up in different fields for one person. If the change comes sudden and is felt as severe, it is particularly grounding to focus on what remains stable. Results of a study showed, that continuity acts as a driving force of change and that change and continuity require each other.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Lorenzo, G. & Liebhart, M. (2010) ,Between Planned and Emergent Change: Decision Maker's Perceptions of Managing Change in Organisations' International Journal of Knowledge, Culture and Change Management, Volume 10, Issue 5, pp. 147-162

The process that Margit designed first, however, is aimed at a group of people, who are concurrently affected by the change.

They are connected through work relationships: either leaders of the same organisation, or all members of the same organisational unit. The process designed enables people to go through these aspects as groups of different sizes arriving at an empathetic understanding of different views, feelings & needs. Not agreement, but empathetic understanding that often opens up to fruitful directed action.<sup>3</sup>

*It is key to have an experienced facilitator co-creating and holding the social dialogue atmosphere.<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> The process aims at allowing the group to enter the quality of reflective or empathetic dialogue in their exchange. Experience shows that from there work in the quality of generative dialogue can emerge. Compare Williams, I. (1999) "dialogue and the art of thinking together" Doubleday. New York and Scharmer, C.O. 's 4 fields of conversation ( (2014) "Theory U: leading from the future: presencing as social technique")

<sup>4</sup> Compare to what Isaac Williams calls "container".

### Here is the description of the 7 steps in the group process:

1. The process starts with bringing all the information and facts available on the change together.
2. In this phase the process focuses on sharing and understanding information and facts. The participants are then divided in groups, where they fill in the 4 aspects together. What is joy for one can be a worry for someone else; the same aspects may turn up in e.g. the field of continuity and the field of worry. The rule for the groupwork is to accept what comes up, plot it as it is experienced and try to understand why the person says what she says. At the end of this first group work, a representative of the group is chosen. His responsibility is to represent the whole in the next step of the process. There for the group briefs her shortly.
3. Now new roles are taken by each member of the group: representative, interviewer, protocol writer, listener.
4. New groups are formed aiming at a maximal mix. Each group containing a representative, interviewer, protocol writer and up to three listeners.
5. Now the interviewer leads the representative through the 4 aspects using 4 simple questions: What worries you? What are you happy about? What really changes for you? What stays constant for you? Clarifying questions are allowed throughout the interview. Directing questions or sharing own views should be suspended.
6. At the end all participants come together in the plenary. It is the protocol writers who share very briefly the essence of the interview. The facilitator checks with the corresponding representative if she feels, in tendency, understood.
7. The process ends. A break is good at this point, to let the process unfold its effect.

### Here are some possibilities on how to proceed after this sequence:

- Seeing with fresh eyes what is essential, develop quick wins
- Deepening the results by scaling, prioritising or organizing into a matrix
- Use the cultivated land as a starting point for a strategy development or review process
- Let the result of the process unfold its effect of grip, orientation and interconnectedness



## Try it out!

This simple model and the process have been practiced over 7 years with leaders and collaborators of different organisations. For example, technicians, scientists, care workers or school directors and political decision-makers. The experienced effect in groups and leaders is, that they calm down internally and open up, feeling ready to face the change, feeling ready to discuss and take steps forward.<sup>5</sup>

Once one has experienced the effect of using this approach, it can be re-used, whenever new changes emerge. At the beginning, in the middle, at the end of the crisis or concurrently. In the end, it may serve as a road map and general attitude towards the changing. It can catalyse the effects on the individual, a group or company.

While we do not know yet, what the results and changes of the Corona Crisis will be in the future, it can be said with much certainty, that change will accompany us at a fast pace over the next weeks and months.

<sup>5</sup> Compare Scharmer, O "the inner place of leadership that we operate from"

## Please get in touch for any queries!

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Use the tool to consolidate as individual or group of decision-makers and leaders. At its best the result can be a clearer vision, feel better braced towards the change and take better decisions on what to do next.

As outlined above, the quality of the process and process atmosphere are key to reach the best possible effect. For that, do turn to an experienced facilitator or coach. As this may not always be possible, we aimed at describing the model and individual exercise detailed and simple. So, for the individual work, it may already be helpful to find a good sparring partner, someone that you trust to speak openly about yourself.

For the group level, we recommend to get support from facilitators who are very experienced in co-creating and holding the container or 'keeping the social sphere clean'. It is necessary to use the tool and the process with the right attitude and humility. This means as leaders and facilitators we need to be open to what emerges from the group. Being aware: it may help the group confront the changing better, it does not have to. Key is to be present to what emerges and take good action.

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