

New approaches to communication management for transformation and change in organisations

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Abstract In the new millennium, organisations are going through rapid changes and the role of strategic management is challenged. When the organisation is threatened by environmental changes such as crises or competition as a result of information technology development or increased customer demands, the need for communication increases. During high change situations, when the publics of the organisation become involved in the change issues, they actively seek information about the issues. If the organisation could utilise communication management more effectively and in a two-way, participative way, they would build more positive relationships with the publics involved and reorganise themselves out of disorder. Strategic planning will become even more important, but will have to change to a contingency approach and emphasise flexibility and relationship building.

This paper looks at organisational processes during change and how they can be managed by communication. Implications are drawn from chaos, postmodern and complexity theory as well as the contingency view of communication. The authors create a framework for scanning and analysing processes and settings, and suggest an alternative strategic, symmetrical and ethical communication approach to respond to problems. They present a new paradigm that emerges as a response to polarisation and treats communication as more receiver-centred, stakeholder-based, relationship-building-oriented and of strategic importance. This paper lays a foundation for an alternative perspective to the central problems of the communication discipline against the background of new emerging multidisciplinary approaches.

KEYWORDS: change management, chaos theory, postmodernism, complexity theory, contingency approach, communication management

INTRODUCTION

Many changes are occurring globally in all spheres — socio-economics, politics, information technology and also in

business and managerial innovation. These and developments in information technology and the Internet are forcing business managers to develop new

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management systems every day and forcing corporate leaders into transformation and change. New media through which to communicate are constantly being created, bringing information to everyone with an active interest in innovation and technological developments.

When the organisation is threatened by environmental change, such as crises or competition as a result of information technology development or increased customer demands on service and product innovation, the need for communication increases.¹ The role of the public relations or communication manager as part of top management and strategic decision making is becoming increasingly important as organisations are redesigning to become more open and structurally more horizontal in order to adjust to fast-changing environments in the communication age.² Organisations that want to excel use communication management to assist in transformation and relationships within the environment. Communication practitioners are also more likely to play a managerial and strategic role in the organisation during times of instability.³

The main purpose of this paper is thus to discuss briefly the different approaches to change and transformation, highlight evolving and postmodern approaches, and explain the significance of communication management within these developing change management approaches.

In order to understand fully the approaches of change, as well as the implications for communication management, it is necessary to look first at the concepts and attempt to explain the terminology involved.

DEFINING THE CONCEPTS

Communication management and public relations are described as the process of 'overall planning, execution and evaluation

of an organisation's communication'.⁴ They are used to manage the relationships between an organisation and its public, on which its success or failure depends, particularly as it is in the business of negotiations, conflict management and building favourable, mutually beneficial relationships.⁵

Change and transformation

Change in organisational terms is referred to by Moss Kauter *et al.* as 'the shift in behaviour of the whole organisation, to one degree or another'.⁶ They mention that if this change does not occur in character, the change is only cosmetic, short-lived, and will not have the desired effects. They equate change, if it requires an alteration in conduct, with transformation. Thus change, when referring to structurally short-lived events, episodes or reorganisation, is superficial and temporary. If any financial resources are spent on such a change, they are simply wasted. Only if transformation takes place and the changes are internalised in the hearts of people will behavioural modification occur and the desired effects be achieved.

Transformation, according to Head,⁷ is the 'step-by-step process of restructuring an existing organisation — removing what does not work, keeping that which does, and implementing new systems, structures, or cultural values where appropriate'. Head adds that transformation occurs when an organisation taps into the complete potential of their human resources and aligns both the structural and the cultural processes involved in the overall goals of the organisation. With transformation a whole new culture is formed based on trust, transparency and constant learning.

Business transformation, according to Gouillart and Kelly,⁸ is equivalent to a living organism, which is created, then grows, goes through stages of development both 'in sickness and in

health', matures, grows old and eventually dies. Organisations are influenced by environmental turbulence and to survive these changes, an organisation must have the ability to transform all its different elements and subsystems in a combined quest for shared objectives. Transformation implies the alignment of all the different systems of an organisation.⁹ It is the holistic management of the physical attributes of a system, but more importantly the spiritual essence of any system.

Gouillart and Kelly¹⁰ describe transformation as not merely the free flow of information and the management of information, but the total trend of connectivity — relationships. This connectivity creates knowledge communities — business communities that care for society as a whole. These communities develop people, accept responsibility, contribute and adapt to the environment by building relationships and connections with all stakeholders involved.

Gouillart and Kelly further state the difference between change and transformation, when clearly stating that: 'the transformation can't start until "they" are transformed. One at a time, their hearts and minds must be filled with the motivation and commitment, until a critical mass has been reached. Then change can begin.' Change is often understood as restructuring or rearranging, but transformation is more than just something that can physically be seen. 'Mechanical rearrangement' is not the same as holistic transformation.¹¹ Restructuring has definite short-term benefits, but it is an illusion that in the long run these physical changes can lead to true transformation.

Organisational development

Another concept, often used as a synonym for change, is organisation development (OD). Organisational development is

referred to by Cummings and Worley¹² as 'a systemwide application of behavioural science knowledge to the planned development and reinforcement of organisational strategies, structures, and processes for improving an organisation's effectiveness'. But these authors also explain that OD is more concerned with transferring knowledge and skills that extend the ability of the organisation to achieve its goals — 'improved problem solving, responsiveness, quality of work life, and effectiveness'. Change management refers to broader processes involving technology, management and social innovations, and they do not necessarily contribute to the improvement of the organisation.

To conclude this section on the conceptualisation of the terminology, Head¹³ effectively states that 'whether you label the change effort an organisational transformation, or reengineering, or right-sizing, or quality building effort, a common language should be established inside the company, and the focus should be on the principles or values behind the change effort — what you are changing and what are the bottom-line outcomes'. The change effort should thus not only be structural — it should involve the mind, body and spirit of all the employees involved. Not just 'change', but true 'transformation'.

For the rest of this paper, the concepts of change and transformation will be used interchangeably, although a complete and holistic approach will be implied.

APPROACHES TO CHANGE MANAGEMENT

As this paper does not set out to explore the change management approaches in detail, the traditional approaches will be summarised in order to provide a backdrop against which emergent approaches will be understood. Many change management scripts and texts such

as those mentioned in the list of references provide a thorough analysis on the development of the traditional approaches to change management and will thus not be discussed here.

The traditional approaches to change and management

There are two main approaches to organisational change management. The first approach is a more traditional and planned approach representing a variety of models, most of which descend from the practice of organisational development (OD).^{14,15} The second major approach represents emergent perspectives and will be discussed after looking at the traditional approaches to change management.

The three most important models of the planned or OD cadre of change are the action research model, the three-step model and the phases of planned change approach.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ Action research was designed to address social and organisational issues and involves a collective approach where all parties involved participate in the formulation of research problems as well as the action taken to solve these problems. The change process thus becomes a learning process. It is a rational systematic analysis of issues through social action.

The second model proposes that change should involve three steps of 'unfreezing', 'moving' and 'refreezing', which means that old behaviour has to be discarded before new ways can be adopted successfully.¹⁹ A further elaboration of this model is the third model of planned change, which consists of change phases (distinct states an organisation moves through), and change processes (methods to move the organisation through these states). This model concentrated on mostly structural changes.

Specific characteristics of the planned approach (OD) is that it places emphasis on processes; deals with change over a

significant period of time; follows a holistic approach; encourages participation; ensures full support from top management; and involves a facilitator who takes on the role of change agent.²⁰

An interesting development of the planned approaches is that these approaches are starting to recognise that although the changes are planned they need to take cognisance of the unpredictable and turbulent environment and that plans will have to be flexible in order to be effective.

Criticisms against these three models are that they are still seen as too rigid; that phases cannot be so distinct and chronologically ordered because of the extreme turbulence in the environment; that the emphasis is on incremental and isolated change rather than radical transformation; that reliance on management is too heavy; and the fact that one kind of change could work for all organisations.²¹

The approaches to change management seem to be directly tied to managerial behaviour. The traditional ontology of management science relies heavily on the fact that systems that change cause conflict between parties involved in and influenced by the systems.²² Management sees its role within this paradigm as reducing conflict, creating order, controlling chaos and simplifying all the complexities created by the environment. Within the views of Newtonian science and modernity, organisations are operated according to deterministic, predictable and stable modes.²³ Risk and surprise should always be avoided, and the company's performance is plotted out and strategically planned. Variations and disturbances are a sign of poor management.²⁴

Within the modernist organisation great mistakes are the consequences of large causes. Conflict or crises result from poor planning and loose control. Structure and the control of having a finger on

everything is the only way to keep systems from disintegrating into total chaos and ultimately destruction.²⁵ Change, according to this worldview, is 'overcoming variations to ensure the status quo'.²⁶

The traditional view of management in terms of communication is that information is power and it has to be controlled and 'fed to employees in little doses'.²⁷ This worldview implies that structures determine the information needed and that perceptions must be managed by feeding the 'right' information and withholding information that might lead to disorder and chaos.²⁸

For many decades this approach worked well because the pace of life was slower, managers' authority was rarely challenged, jobs were more certain and the environment was more stable.^{29,30}

Developments in information technology, overloaded systems, better-informed employees, worldwide access to information and even family life changes, such as the roles of men and women, have, however, caused a revolution. Turbulence in society has created uncertainty and complexity and has moved organisations to new approaches and worldviews.

The second postmodern approach to change was developed because the highly dynamic environment demanded more contingent methods, which would be more situational and change strategies would be adapted to achieve maximum fit with the ever-altering environment.

It is important to note that many of the traditional models of planned change and OD, and even the original contingency view, evolved from their original positions because of pressures from the environment and the realities of postmodern organisational life. Contemporary adaptations to action research, for example, address imbalances in power and resource allocation across different groups,

and action researchers are becoming instigators and activists in the change process causing conflict and chaos.³¹

Another contemporary development of the OD models that can be used to illustrate this point is the integrated strategic approach (ISC), where participation is emphasised and all employees are involved in the analysis, planning and implementation process in order to improve coordination and integration of all subsystems and create shared ownership and commitment.

Transorganisational development (TD) emerged because of the realisation that organisations are all part of a bigger system and are interdependent. TD is a form of planned change that assists organisations in collaborating with other organisations to share resources and risk, and also concerns mergers and acquisitions. These sometimes paradoxical and revolutionary developments are in line with the emerging approaches to organisational change hence being discussed.

Approaches for the new millennium: Postmodernism, chaos theory, complexity theory and the contingency approach

New approaches to management bring a freedom of less control and a more organic, holistic and ecological organisation — living systems.³²

According to Youngblood: 'Living systems operate in complex environments where centralized control would be a one-way ticket to extinction'.³³ Organisations that operate like living systems are more open, flexible, creative, balanced and respond more to the changes in the environment. These organisations are also more caring and strive towards healthy relationships with groups which could be influenced by the organisation and which could influence the organisation. Change management strategies are directly influenced by

strategic management developments and emerging principles of strategic management.³⁴

Three emergent approaches will be discussed, with an emphasis on change management. It must be emphasised that this is a far from exhaustive and much simplified discussion on these approaches, but the explanations serve as background to understanding the implications of these approaches for change and communication management.

Postmodernism and complexity

The more academic definition of postmodernism is 'incredulity towards meta-narratives'.³⁵ In simple terms this means that different groups within society take on different perspectives of reality and truth, each trying to make sense of their environment in order to achieve their goals and to make sense of what they perceive and experience. Since these approaches or views are created out of the unique circumstances of each group, it is impossible to unify or conform these views into one single grand account or description of reality. Postmodernism is characterised by the coexistence of different discourses and paradoxes but with the important distinction of being part of a complex set of relationships and interlinked networks.³⁶ This network of society fabricates knowledge and results in an explosion of information. The different clusters in the network of society have an organic life of growth, constant interaction, change and self-organising processes by which meaning is created. The non-linear relationships in the network of society interact around the competition for resources and boundaries are constantly challenged. In order to create meaning it is necessary for systems to be as diverse as possible, and not structured, because diversity creates rich information that can be managed to become knowledge and wisdom.

Complexity refers to the fact that in a system 'there are more possibilities than can be actualised'.³⁷ Within the framework of postmodernism complex systems have the following characteristics pertinent to this paper:

- complex systems consist of a large number of elements: organisations consist of varied elements in different dimensions
- these elements all interact dynamically: all the different departments and levels interact constantly in order to reach the organisational goals
- the levels of information sharing and interaction in complex systems are fairly rich: all the different networks of organisations interact formally, informally, on different levels and with different abilities
- the interactions are non-linear and asymmetric where small causes can have large effects and there are power differences that feed this non-linearity: organisations have many internal power levels and there is constant competition for resources
- the interactions cluster together in networks because there are no controlling levels: organisational information sharing is usually centred around groups that have to perform the same function and have shared goals and expectations
- feedback loops are interlinked in large networks and information forces the system constantly to transform: environmental scanning brings new information into the system, which forces it to adjust and thus transform
- complex systems are open systems that interact with the environment and other systems
- these systems function under conditions far from equilibrium: organisations that are stable and have no free flow of energy forcing them to transform continuously and to fight entropy eventually cease to exist
- complexity has the effect that individuals who function in that system will never fully understand and know everything about that system: in organisations the chief executive officer (CEO) and

management will never know everything there is to know about the organisation and therefore need every employee of the system to manage and share information.

The interaction of all the subsystems of a complex system and the role of the relationships formed, as well as the creation of information and knowledge through these interactions, form the basis of the complexity approach.

Postmodern theorists argue that power is spread throughout systems in society and it should be challenged, thereby inherently causing transformation.³⁸ Postmodern public relations should play an important role in empowering marginalised groups by involving all stakeholders. It should furthermore create diversity and dialogue and especially recognise differences and dissent between the organisation and its publics. A strategic and holistic view of public relations is stressed by the postmodernists, and discourse and a critical approach are promulgated.

An important point to stress at this stage is that the chaos approach is described as differing from the complexity approach because it is seen as a state where no patterns can be distinguished and without any order, patterns or understandable detail and with utter confusion.³⁹ The complexity theory, on the other hand, postulates that systems have patterns and models if viewed from a distance and over time. Another distinction is made by Cilliers,⁴⁰ who explains that 'complexity' refers to a much broader category than 'chaos'. For the purpose of this paper the similarities between these approaches will be highlighted and not the differences between them.

The chaos approach

The chaos theory started out with the basic principles of the systems theory and grew into what is summarised by Overman⁴¹ from various definitions by

other authors as 'the study of complex, dynamic systems that reveal patterns of order out of seemingly chaotic behaviors ... the study of complex, deterministic, non-linear, dynamic systems ... so complex and dynamic, in fact, as to appear chaotic'.

Chaos is 'the final state in a system's movement away from order'.⁴² It can be understood as the state where a system can no longer sustain a stable pattern of behaviour because of an increasingly changing environment and subsequently leads to the system reorganising itself to adjust to these changes.⁴³ Chaos theory attempts to understand why systems seem not to function in linear, predictable, conventional ways, but when studied from a distance display patterns and structures.⁴⁴ It is a term that can be used to explain a number of both natural and artificial phenomena such as weather patterns, stock prices, economies, traffic patterns and even biological aspects such as heart arrhythmia.⁴⁵

The term 'chaos' is actually a misnomer because although it seems as if it implicates total disorder and no traceable pattern, chaos is still deterministic and basically Newtonian in that it provides definite answers and methods.⁴⁶ Behind all the order and non-linearity observed in chaos states lie an order and pattern, and new relationships and structures emerge out of what seems to be incomprehensible and out of control. According to Wheatley,⁴⁷ 'there is so much order that our attempts to separate out discrete moments create the appearance of disorder'. If we view chaotic systems over time and from a distance they always demonstrate inherent orderliness.⁴⁸⁻⁵⁰

Organisations can adapt, renew, maintain and grow through self-organisation brought about by chaos. The contribution of the chaos theory to management lies in the appreciation of change, chaos and uncertainty and not in

the distrust and need to control any disorder.⁵¹ It also lies in the appreciation of the faith in the self-organising nature of chaos.^{52,53} The interdependence of subsystems and the natural cooperative nature of these subsystems and the wholeness of reality are a further contribution of chaos theory to the management of organisations. The self-organising abilities of systems also contribute in the sense that they provide hope for management that individual actions can make a big difference (this is termed the butterfly effect) and that there is order behind the chaos. The perceptions of control and the need to predict make a shift to a much larger scale and order.

Importance of interdependence, participation and relationships

A very important contribution of the chaos approach relevant to this paper is the participatory nature of the new approaches to change management. Wheatley⁵⁴ suggests a way out from the non-objective, chaotic and complex world of the new sciences. Traditionally the interpretation of data and information was done by management, which in turn led to filtering, subjectivity, exclusivity and over-control. She suggests that there is interdependence between different subsystems in an organisation (as the extension of the systems theory to the postmodern and complexity theories implies). This interdependence suggests that all the subsystems should take part in the processes of the system. Participation could add to the richness of information, shared responsibility, more trust and transparency and, ultimately, to healthier relationships. This interdependency and participation in turn imply relationships — the sharing in decision making, as well as in the dissemination and interpretation of information throughout the organisation.

According to the chaos theory the process and the building of relationships

are key and development and maintenance of these relationships are of more importance than the outcomes, players or objects themselves. Meaning is derived from relationships and not from the party in isolation. Because of the interdependency of systems with the environment, relationships actually give meaning to the entities and meaning is not situated within the entities themselves.⁵⁵

Youngblood⁵⁶ defined a relationship as the 'commitment of two or more people to supporting each other in the pursuit of a common goal'. He adds that relationships are not only relevant between people but include all living systems and they consist of commitment, mutual support and common goals. Grunig and Huang⁵⁷ further applied the concepts of control mutuality — which could include mutual support — joint acceptance of degrees of symmetry, trust and satisfaction with the relationship to communication management.

Relationship building in organisations is an indicator of successful public relations and communication management.⁵⁸ The order seated in the holism of systems and subsystems co-creates environments and relationships.⁵⁹ The natural flow and flexibility of living systems contribute to greater access to information, power levels, new technology and developments that renew and change organisations more effectively.⁶⁰

An important affirmation of the chaos theory is that the strong connections between the diverse elements contained in a system cause it to be more capable of sustaining itself at a state away from the point of balance or equilibrium. The ability to change an organisation will lie in the challenges of relationship management, and not in changing the structures or functions of individuals. Communication strengthens the connections between entities of a system.⁶¹

Because of the interdependence of

systems and the connections that form between entities, well-defined borders are broken down. 'The universe is energy fields coming into relationship with one another, forming something temporarily.'⁶² Networks of information fill spaces and lead to bifurcations and new systems and networks are formed.⁶³ Constant influences and changes in the environment, and the ever-increasing networks and relationships with outside systems, eventually create 'borderless' aggregates.

Douglas Kiel⁶⁴ has adopted the principles of chaos theory to organisational management, and he contends that an organisation's boundaries become blurred and that external factors and stakeholders such as citizens and the government define the parameters of dynamics and change over time. The structures of the system constantly change and this creates instability, but this instability is necessary to enable systems to respond to the demands of the environment. Processes should support the organisation's abilities to renew, develop and change. 'The way work is organised, the attitudes employees hold, and the technologies they use all serve to create the boundaries of performance boundaries which emerge through dialogue and process.'⁶⁵

Here lies another big paradox of the chaos theory. Openness to the environment leads to greater sense of identity because of the self-organising ability of open systems. 'High levels of autonomy and identity result from staying open to information from the outside'.⁶⁶ The process of exchange and interaction actually leads to greater freedom from influences from the environment. If an organisation builds on its core competencies it can adjust and respond much faster to new opportunities because it is not fixed. At the same time it is sensitive to emerging markets, changes in consumer needs and threats from groups

which could influence the organisation.^{67,68}

Self-renewing dynamics explain the boundary-spanning nature of developing open systems that address the total reality rather than its parts. Democracy should be maintained by considering and building stable relationships with consumers, citizens and all affected parties of the organisation or enterprise. 'Co-evolution is how living systems co-create environments and relationships that sustain and accommodate everything within that environment.'⁶⁹

This short summary of the chaos theory principles applicable to relationships and communication management highlights the dissimilar approach to change and the break away from modernity and a planned approach to transformation management in organisations. The contingency approach further emphasises this rift between traditional approaches and the emergent practice of management.

The contingency approach

The contingency approach was first presented by organisation theorists Lawrence and Lorsch in the 1960s. They found that the external environment has an impact on organisational structure and management, and that different forms of organisation occur under different environmental conditions. Thus, they concluded that there is not one best way to organise and that various forms of organisation have to be adapted to the environmental conditions.⁷⁰

Similar to the chaos and complexity approaches, the contingency theory has its roots in general systems theory originating in the theories of Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Norbert Wiener, Talcott Parsons and Claude Shannon.⁷¹ Bertalanffy, a biologist, suggested that dynamic interaction is the underlying problem in all fields of modern science and that general principles for all systems can be discovered. Applied in the

study of organisations, the systems theory provides a view of an organisation in interaction with its environment.⁷² Despite its roots, the contingency view has developed independently and the modern approach considers systems theory a heuristic tool rather than a doctrine laying down a framework for the contingency view. Pearson described this kind of application of the systems theory as a view emphasising the ideas of interdependence and interconnectedness but considering strategic management and goal setting as a compatible idea.⁷³

In the 1980s, Kast and Rosenzweig formulated the contingency approach as a view seeking to understand interrelationships among subsystems and suprasystems and to define patterns of relationships between key variables. It is directed toward understanding how organisations act under varying conditions and which actions would be the most appropriate for specific situations.⁷⁴ According to the contingency view, one key management function is to develop congruence between an organisation and its subsystems and environment, because this leads to greater effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction. Thus, the modern contingency view of strategic management holds also to the view that an organisation has to be an open system in order to align its activities with the external environment.

The current concern of management theorists on the accelerating rate of change puts the traditional contingency view to the test. Can an organisation align its actions with the environment if change is continuous? How can an organisation predict the future? Can change be planned? The postmodern contingency view responds to this challenge by admitting that prediction may not be possible any longer, but stating that when the alignment activity is also continuous, an organisation is alert to any change and is constantly seeking a better alignment. It

may never be at an optimal point at one time but it is approximating the alignment as well as it can and it pays off.

Management is engaged in a continuous problem-solving process making individual decisions and taking gradual steps towards its vision of its future. Planned change becomes a process of introducing some changes and criticising the planned changes to improve the chosen solution to a problem rather than the discovery and implementation of a particular solution to a problem and, then, taking up a new problem.

Already in the 1980s, Kast and Rosenzweig refuted the accusations that the contingency approach is a deterministic view. They clearly described how a fit between an organisation and its environment is dependent on organisational decision makers. They perceive and interpret specific situations and translate them into actions and solutions. Thus, it is not necessary that change in one part of a system results in change in other parts of the system. The contingency view has been critiqued also for being mechanistic in nature and making strategic orientation impossible because it confines all alternatives into one optimal.⁷⁵ In the 1990s, Jaatinen presented her symmetrical contingency view of public relations in which she argues that the contingency view does indeed leave some space for strategic choice. She contends that there are usually several alternatives to choose from, and that decision makers have some autonomy in relation to the environment.⁷⁶ The contingency view is a mode of thinking and selecting between different courses of action based on a situational analysis — all viable solutions to a problem and a way forward. In addition, decision makers usually have to be satisfied with good enough solutions because no one knows which are the optimal solutions.

Osmo Wiio introduced the contingency

view in communication research in the 1970s. He developed a contingency theory of communication, which was further developed by Åberg⁷⁷ and Jaatinen.^{78,79} According to Wiio, a communication system and the objectives of communication have to be adapted to internal and external conditions in order to achieve the effects sought for.⁸⁰ He described communication as a system of elaboration of information constrained by fixed and contingency factors.⁸¹ Åberg applied the theory in strategic communications, developing a contingency analysis of internal and external factors that have to be taken into account in formulating and implementing a communication strategy. In particular, he introduced a stakeholder approach to the contingency view by applying it in his model for contingency analysis.⁸²

The most recent publication in this tradition is the symmetrical contingency view introduced by Jaatinen in relation to her research on lobbying and public affairs. According to her, communication is a system of communicative interactions between different levels of a system, which, ideally, is seeking a resolution of conflicts between an organisation and its stakeholders.⁸³ A more general contingency theory of communication arising from her research could be formulated in the following way: the communication system and the objectives and means of communication are chosen by decision makers who perceive and interpret specific situations and seek to align the system with internal and external conditions in order to achieve a good result. A fit is possible if the scanning and feedback systems are effective and conflict resolution takes place at the end of the interaction. The contingency factors impose certain conditions on organisational activity but these factors can also be affected by the organisation.

It can be derived from the contingency

view that management has to take change or need for change into account and align different levels of a system with each other to improve effectiveness, efficiency and satisfaction. The alignment activity should be a continuous mode of thinking and acting, proacting and reacting. The management and communication systems have to be tuned to change (fit to contingency factors) and actions chosen have to be appropriate for the circumstances and specific situations in order to achieve an objective and bring about change. Responding to or affecting change is dependent on contingency factors: demand for change, hindrances against change and the nature of change (its effect on organisational goal attainment and management preferences). It naturally follows from these premises that communication should be symmetrical in nature and should focus on conflict resolution.

SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE POSTMODERN, CHAOS AND CONTINGENCY APPROACHES AND A WAY FORWARD FOR CHANGE MANAGEMENT

Emergent approaches to change have a few characteristics in common.⁸⁴ Change is seen as a continuous process of learning and experimentation to adapt and align to the turbulent environment; small-scale changes over time can lead to larger changes in the organisations; managers should create a climate of risk taking and empower employees through participation to manage the change process; managers should create a collective vision to direct the change process; their key activities should be information gathering, communication and learning.

Interrelationships of subsystems are stressed in all of these approaches, and they all emphasise the importance of defining patterns of interactions and dialogue.

Another common denominator is the use of scenarios — selecting different courses, introducing changes and then criticising them again. This process ensures that changes in the organisation are constantly redirected and that they keep track of changes in the environment.

All these emergent approaches are not deterministic and do not provide simple plans and answers for change efforts. Conflicts are created through discourse but resolution for conflicts are also found through interactions between the elements of these complex systems. Common suggestions for an approach dealing with change include suggestions for a free flow of information; emphasis on relationship management and symmetrical communication for resolving conflicts; empowerment of people to engage in fitting activity for a quick response to changes; preference for diversity in all roles for a more accurate perception; scenario planning rather than set pre-planning; and a participatory approach to guarantee internal interaction, commitment and direction. These characteristics bind these emergent approaches to change management and create a new way of dealing with transformation.

To conclude this section on the approaches, it is vital to note that organisations tend to follow a combination of the planned and emergent approaches to change management, depending on their circumstances and the specific objectives of the organisation.⁸⁵ In a stable environment where small, localised changes are called for, the changes are more planned and focus is placed on technical and structural changes. Emergent approaches are apt in a turbulent environment where changes affect the whole organisation and the focus is thus more on human resources and behaviour. One can argue, though, whether the world we live in will ever again be considered stable and whether we

can afford to plan when the future is influenced by a myriad of unpredictable variables. If we answer in favour of emergent approaches, the implications for communication management are profound.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE EMERGENT APPROACHES FOR COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT DURING CHANGE IN ORGANISATIONS

There are basically two viewpoints to change communication: one dealing with single incidents of change (such as a crisis suggesting crisis communication), and the other dealing with communication in a constantly changing environment, thus suggesting a continuous approach to change management. The emergent approaches address continuous change becoming part of everyday change communication. In a continuously changing environment, change is an everyday challenge to communications, and communication should become part and parcel of the change management process. Change communications should be integrated into change management. If communication could become a 'strange attractor' and change could become a constant, continuous process, this could become a core value. Thus constant change becomes a core value of the culture of the organisation and the change management process would not have to address a change in culture itself.⁸⁶

Communication consultants⁸⁷ suggest that the communication managers' role in the chaotic organisation is changing and that it will not be sufficient to create effective technical communications such as newsletters or annual reports. They should become involved in establishing effective communication channels to facilitate dialogue, diversity of ideas and participative decision making for change.

Communicators should know their trade and train management to lead by example. Interpersonal and management communication skills are becoming increasingly important, and communication managers could assist executives to build their skills so that they can identify issues, provide contexts for information and interpret possibilities.^{88,89}

Free flow of information

Traditionally the immediate reaction to disorder caused by changes was to clamp down on information and to control it. Flower⁹⁰ suggests a radical approach to the flow of information. He suggests that chaos should be created by providing an overflow of relevant and important information to such an extent that it overwhelms employees. He explains that people then get scared and frustrated and try to control the information, but feeding them with even more information finally causes them to give up and let go. Only then can people develop the ability to look at the information holistically and form knowledge and wisdom out of it all — knowledge that is adaptive and transforming.

The flow of information in a system is what keeps a system alive⁹¹ and it also builds strength into a system. Communication managers are responsible for the creation and translation of symbols in organisations⁹² and the more complex the system, the more the responsibility of the manager to create shared meanings about the interpretations of symbols.^{93,94} It is also interesting that the more information is processed during times of change, conflict and complex decision making, the higher the quality of the decisions ultimately made. According to Spicer⁹⁵ 'communication managers are more likely to engage in symbol creation behaviors, especially ones involving external stakeholders during times of uncertainty'.

Relationship management

In the management of organisations, effectiveness is achieved when organisations attain their goals, but the goals must be appropriate in relation to the organisation's environment. If not, strategic constituencies within that environment will keep it from achieving its goals and, ultimately, its mission.⁹⁶ Communication management helps the organisation achieve these goals by identifying and building healthy relationships with the strategic constituencies. The healthier these relationships are, the more likely the organisation will be successfully achieving what it sets out to achieve. The quality of these relationships determines the effectiveness of the public relations function within the organisation. Living systems and learning organisations should concentrate on relationships and how they work. 'Relationships skills are no longer a luxury. They are a necessity — both in business and for our global survival.'⁹⁷

New, more fluid structures will replace traditional hierarchical structures and information exchange will increase and accelerate. The 'network organisation' as mentioned by Bush and Frohman in 1991 is designed around communicators who 'bridge, meld, and thus create synergy amongst the organisational units'.⁹⁸ This involves horizontal communication across departments and organisational borders in order to achieve creativity and innovation. Communication managers could fulfil the bridging functions and facilitate interaction and network building, as well as contributing to management, by 'helping the corporation adjust to this change by creating understanding and making knowledge more productive'.⁹⁹

The role of communication management is becoming increasingly relevant, if not invaluable. The core responsibility of communication management is the maintenance of relationships and the facilitation of

interaction.^{100,101} Therefore communication becomes the basic requirement for self-organisation and communication management becomes the strategic tool to manage the interactions. Public relations and communication management describe communication with 'both external and internal publics — groups that affect the ability of an organisation to meet its goals'.¹⁰²

Empowerment approach

Kiel¹⁰³ promotes the idea that management should create learning organisations that are flexible and fluctuating. He proposes citizen participation and stresses that although this could bring about complexity, 'empowered and involved citizens could fulfil the intention of democracy'.¹⁰⁴ They participate in the process of creating service to customers and clients. Thus they create their own reality and take ownership of it. The borders of the organisation become open and no definite lines can be distinguished. The implications for the other functions within the organisation become prevalent. Strict differentiation between functions in the organisation can cause fragmentation. Subsystems should rather be more flexible with an interdisciplinary approach of working together to achieve strategic organisational goals.

Within the emergent perspectives more emphasis is placed on relationships between entities and not on the characteristics of the entities themselves.^{105,106} 'Relationships are all there is to reality and nothing exists independent of its relationships with the environment'.¹⁰⁷ If communication management is all about relationship building, then the importance of this field of study to management is self-evident.

McDaniel¹⁰⁸ is of the opinion that it is the responsibility of management to get people together and to help them engage

in dialogue so that they can improve the process of self-organisation and change. The new leaders should constantly seek opportunities to connect groups and individuals. High-quality, long-term relationships where mutual understanding and enrichment are promoted and nurtured should be one of the key issues of strategic management for change.¹⁰⁹

Wheatley¹¹⁰ notes that the new manager should be more concerned with the maintaining of relationships than ever before because of the self-organising nature of relationships: 'In effect, goals are secondary to those relationships that make it possible to achieve goals.' Wheatley further says that effective leadership is about the basics of guiding a vision, strong values and organisational beliefs and she stresses the leader's task to communicate these but still allow employees the freedom to question, discuss and think laterally.

Participatory nature of emergent approaches

Another major contribution of the emergent theories to change management is the participative nature of new sciences management.¹¹¹ If employees participate in decision making they will also take ownership for the work they are doing and they will feel that they have an emotional investment in their work. Just as reality is what is observed in quantum logic, in the same manner employees will only see a decision as 'real' if they have interacted with it and they will only commit once they have participated. It is almost possible to say that if employees participate in all the decision-making processes it would not be necessary for management to take the responsibility for changes to happen, the people themselves will make them happen.

Flower¹¹² suggests a revolutionary idea for managers who want to motivate their employees: just do not. Because of the

self-organising ability of systems, employees will make adjustments that would be required from them to prosper. It will thus not be necessary for managers to find ways to drive people, but it is important to provide a suitable environment for them to develop themselves. It is interesting to note that Flower says that one of the most important factors that contribute to this 'suitable environment' is for employees to be involved in relationships that fulfil their social and work-related needs. They must be able to learn, have access to information and be free to choose between a variety of relationships.

From strategic planning to scenario planning

As organisations become less predictable and less controlled, the role of strategic planning can be questioned. It might become more important to plan strategically by looking at possible outcomes, ie scenario management. If managers manage according to the chaos theory and contingency theory, they will not be able to predict accurately.¹¹³ The answer, according to these approaches, would be to look at possibilities of what could happen in future and plan for those possibilities. These 'plans' would also have to be totally flexible and adjustable. According to T. J. Cartwright, a planning expert,¹¹⁴ the new slogan should be 'order without predictability'.

If this is true, the importance of ongoing two-way symmetrical communication and dialogue, as well as environmental scanning, again become significant. The contingency approach to strategic management posits 'organisations are most successful if they align their internal structures and processes with the demands of the environment'.¹¹⁵ This can only be done by maintaining positive relationships through mutual adjustment and constant dialogue, and by scanning the

environment for information on possible changes and crises.

Larkin and Larkin¹¹⁶ summarised it well by saying that in today's complex and changing world 'the decision to restrict communication to certainty is a decision not to communicate at all.

Communication must be brought into alignment with the sorts of changes we are trying to communicate: uncertain, changing, and full of probabilities.'

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Change efforts often fail because the changes are not communicated well, because organisations fail to align change efforts to the strategic goals of the organisation, and because they do not facilitate learning or advanced training.¹¹⁷ Well-developed organisation change should be a strategically managed process but take into consideration all the possibilities of change that could occur in the environment. Traditional studies and models of change management have either ignored the importance of strategic communication as a contribution to successful change, or communication was only seen as a tool in changing culture — simply the first stages of transformation.¹¹⁸⁻¹²⁰ Communication management was not seen as an important contribution in guiding the complete transformation process in terms of building important relationships within and outside the organisation, thereby actually facilitating successful strategic change management.

Because of adverse contingent circumstances change cannot be based on plans and projections, but rather on understanding the complexities of situations and weighing different options available.¹²¹ Emerging approaches to change as discussed above propose that change, and more specifically transformation, should be viewed as a

continuous process linked to the complexities of the changing market, the changing nature of work environments, new management approaches and redefined organisational boundaries and relationships. In order to survive and ensure growth and success it is vitally important for organisations to scan the environment for issues and trends while involving all members of the organisation in this process.¹²² The responsibility for organisational change cannot be carried by a small number of managers and is by necessity becoming decentralised. This is where communication managers can take a leadership role in the change process. They should facilitate participation through dialogue and provide networking structures. Because of their boundary-spanning function they can be the credible research experts in organisations, especially concerning environmental scanning, in order to identify and provide information on emerging issues around which the organisation needs to adapt.

Emerging approaches such as the chaos, postmodern, contingency and complexity theories all stress the importance of interconnectivity between subsystems of societies and organisations as well as the role of relationships creating energy in the form of information and dialogue meaning more than the individual parts of any system. The complex and dynamic nature of the environment is recognised and the subsequent need for employee flexibility and structural alteration. A further very important contribution of these approaches to change management is the view that organisations should create vision and do strategic planning around scenarios to guide actions. It is also crucial to adapt to changes by influencing back on changes and lead change through building relationships, managing conflict and participation in decision making.

To become a truly learning organisation requires the building of knowledge

architecture, the creation of knowledge management processes and a technical infrastructure to support this.¹²³ The main function of the communication manager is the establishment of this knowledge management process and providing networks and structures that enable the collection and dissemination of information and translate it into knowledge through dialogue. Communication leaders should connect teams and workgroups by driving communication and building trust. Involving staff in change management decision making stimulates debate and criticism, which creates opportunities for innovation and revolutionary change.¹²⁴ This learning process creates openness and builds knowledge resources, which are one of the main preconditions for sustainable change. All of this can be created by sound communication management and building relationships with all stakeholders: 'If it is a worthwhile dream, it won't be an easy one to realize. For corporations that may choose to pursue such a future, the prerequisite will be to build trusting relationships with their people, the communities around them, and society as a whole.'¹²⁵

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