



## FOCUS

### Linking power and responsibility – science and philosophy

Ontological Change values conversation, the management of emotions and physiological balance – the language, mood and movement of the human observer.

#### Wisdom Council

The Wisdom Council idea was developed by organizational development consultant Jim Rough. A Wisdom Council is a one-time, randomly-selected group of stakeholders who, through special facilitation, produce a consensus statement which is made available to the larger population for further dialogue and action

<http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-wisdomcouncil.html>

More about the Wisdom Council of Ervin Laszlo can be found at:

<http://www.clubofbudapest.org>

#### Authentic Business

Authentic businesses manage to maintain the perspective that their purpose is more important to them and to their success than profit.

<http://www.authenticbusiness.co.uk>

## Introduction

In this edition I look a little deeper at the science and theory of Ontological Change and its implications for coaching. I see myself as a student seeking understanding, not an expert as such. My aim is simply to share my understanding in the hope that it stimulates your own thinking and perhaps your approach to change, leadership, learning or coaching.

### Power and Responsibility

We live in a time when, as global citizens, we have unprecedented power – and hence a responsibility to support change that could lead to **breakthroughs** in the way we think about what it means to be human. If we don't, we face the prospect of unimaginable **breakdown** – economically, socially and ecologically. Doom and gloom? No, I don't think so. A higher level of consciousness is now emerging that values humanity and human connection, and is opening up new possibilities for us to have a much greater influence over what we want for ourselves (personal power) and for each other (collective responsibility). In my newsletters so far I have explored both the "we" and the "me" dimensions of human ontology and change at a global level.

At a local level though, change is what everyone is talking about. It's like an invisible wind blowing through every conversation.

People all over the world are: wanting change, hating change, being challenged by change or just struggling to deal with change in all its complex forms. They long to get back to a time when there was less stress and less choice, but the arrow of time only takes us forward to more complex and unpredictable times. What we can be sure of is that the pace of change is going to get faster, more uncertain and even paradoxical as it touches all aspects of our lives.

On a global scale, mechanistic change seems to be taking us towards **breakdown** rather than a breakthrough. So is a collapse into chaos inevitable? What's reassuring is that a **breakthrough** is inevitable, but may have to **emerge** organically from the chaos.

### Theory and Philosophy

Science is moving towards radical or cognitive 'constructionism', seeing cognition (the ability 'to know' something) as a biological phenomenon that is 'structurally determined'. For example, we can observe a person's ontology (their 'way of being') in terms of how they behave and what they communicate, but to know what it's like we have to experience it through our own cognitive structure (our nervous system), through which we go from a state of conscious incompetence to unconscious competence. We rely on language, mood and movement to help us interpret what we see, hear and feel. It is through language that we make distinctions (learning) and through interpretation what is real and true for us.

Philosophers from many different traditions have come to the same conclusion – that we construct reality from the inside out. We are the creators, making sense of what we see, hear and feel around us. Having language we are able to give meaning to an objective reality constructed from both a personal and a collective reality.

**Steve Trivett Personal & Professional Change Coach**

Please send your comments, complaints, contributions or compliments to: [steve@changezone.co.uk](mailto:steve@changezone.co.uk)



Our ability to make distinctions through language enables us to learn and change, opening us up to new realities, new possibilities and ever higher levels of consciousness.



## PUBLICATIONS

### The Turning Point

by Fritjof Capra.  
Flamingo 1983

This classic publication has a great chapter on the systems view of life and the dynamic nature of change. Change is constant. In his words "it is a flexible yet stable manifestation of the underlying dynamics that exchange energy and information from multiple perspectives."

### A Path Made by Walking

by Julie Diamond & Lee Spark Jones. Lao Tse Press 2004

The authors introduce the concept of "metaskills" – the feelings, attitudes and values that inform our 'way of being' at a deep and dynamic level when we work with others. Such skills have to 'grown' through conscious effort as well as naturally through experience.

### Disclosing New Worlds

by Spinosa, Flores and Dreyfus. MIT Press 1997

The authors argue that real change occurs when individuals make sustainable changes in the way they understand and deal with themselves as human beings. It's not an easy book to make sense of, but the message is clear – we must set out to make history and innovate through personal leadership (entrepreneurship) and collaboration (democratic action) at the level of values and beliefs.

## A World of Theory

Drawn from the work of Michael D McMaster. His definitive work is 'The Knowledge Advantage'. His has a deep understanding of people and organisations as complex adaptive systems. This brings new and challenging insights into the human condition.

All successful organisations, teams, leaders and managers adopt their own unique approach or way of doing things, each having their own theories for how people work together and the way work is organised.

Those working towards success tend to try and reproduce their operations, seldom concerning themselves with the theories that spawned their success. By moving from observation to action there is no time for considering which actions contributed most to the resulting changes that created the improvement.

In the 'west' we seldom experience theory being talked about at all in the workplace. Hardly surprising then that people do not know why they are behaving in the way they are and what they can do to improving things. They are blind to the science that tells us "all knowing is doing and all doing is knowing" (Humberto Maturana 'The Tree of Knowledge'). Part of the problem is failing to see that theory (how we think about things) is an integral part of our 'way of being'.

We can get better results through our interactions with others, but this takes effective language skills. We cannot create anything without engaging in 'linguistic acts' (go to: <http://www.changezone.co.uk/STEVE/linguisticacts.html> for more information. Fernando Flores, who was Chile's minister of finance and, later, a political prisoner, teaches organisations how to use assessments and commitments to transform the way they do business. The outcome is that executives become more powerful observers of their intentions and what they say and do to achieve them with greater energy and passion.

More about Flores at: <http://www.fastcompany.com/online/21/flores.html>

It is clear to me that if we want to change our 'way of being' we either need to experience a dramatic change in circumstances or we need to create a new theory. Indeed, one tends to lead to the others. It is the theory we choose to use that gives pattern and meaning to the data. This is our interpretation which leads to our conclusions. Peter Senge uses the "Ladder of Inference" to demonstrate this process. See 'The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook'.

As Kurt Lewin famously observed, there was *"nothing as practical as a good theory."* A theory is valid if it produces results that work for us and move us in the direction of our intentions. This is the power of Linguistic Acts that Fernando Flores uses to such great effect and which makes the process of Ontological Coaching so effective.

My observation is that we live in a maelstrom of constant dynamic change – we are always in transition. This is the natural state of all living things, they exist at the 'edge of chaos'. In this state they are both autonomous and dependent. This seems paradoxical, but it is the 'autopoietic' nature of all living systems. It's what makes change dynamic. This is because we are free to choose (our inside-out energy) but cannot be separated from our environment (the outside-in energy). When in balance we are viable and our energy flows, our bodies renew themselves, our emotions remain under control and our level of consciousness rises as our language grows so that we can make more meaningful distinctions and connections.



## USEFUL WEBSITES

### Radical Constructivism

A paper outlining the implications of the radical constructivist perspective on learning and change can be found at:

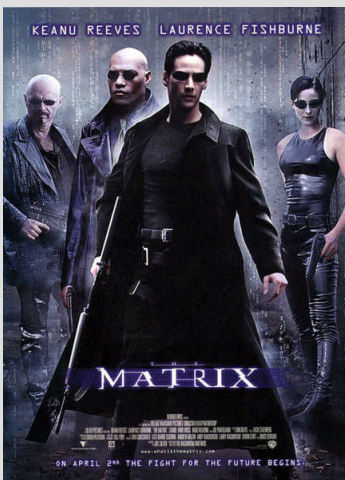
<http://www.univie.ac.at/constructivism/events/asc05/abstracts.html>

### Kevin Kelly & The Matrix

The film The Matrix was based on the thinking of Kevin Kelly about technology and evolutionary biology outlined in his book "Out of Control". It was required reading for actor Keanu Reeves before he could even open the film script. There is more to the Matrix than meets the eye. Explore!

<http://www.kk.org/>  
and  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The\\_Matrix](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Matrix)

or  
<http://www.ohrd.wisc.edu/msdresources/tools/FUNDAMENTALSOFCOACHING.PPS#3>



## Competing World Views

*Drawing in the work of Martin Leith. Martin is no longer working as a consultant, but more information can be found at: <http://www.ideaflow.com/ideagen.htm>. This website also contains a wealth of information on methods that can be used for idea generation, creativity and innovation.*

We all have our own take on the world around us, constructing our own maps of that reflect the distinctions and interpretations that are important to us. This for me is the essence of the learning and change process. Making new distinctions from what we see gives us new meaning from which to make different decisions about how we think and feel about things, and the way we behave with others.

Martin describes 3 world views.

#### Worldview 1 – the world as a machine

... categorising, deconstructing, building, spring-boarding, layering

#### Worldview 2 – the world as a system

... conversation, emergence, do what works, minimal intervention

#### Worldview 3 – the world as a field of energy and consciousness

... vision quest, re-patterning, metaphor, intuition, I Ching



Each world view is nested within the previous one like Russian Dolls. Worldview 1 currently dominates western thinking but is gradually being influenced by systemic thinking as life becomes more complex and interconnected as Worldview 2. As things become even more unpredictable and uncertain Worldview 3 kicks in.

What we seem to be moving towards is a more holistic and evolutionary worldview. Previously stable systems are fragmenting as innovations in technology and culture change the way people relate to each other. The globalization of our world is allowing us to question how our lives can and should be better. All of us want to live peaceful and satisfying lives.

What stops us are the ideologies that come from the top-down, the market pressures that come from the outside-in, the social and cultural constraints that emerge from the bottom-up and most importantly the way we decide to see ourselves and our lives that is created from the inside-out. Find out more at The Change Zone website.

Stuart Heller, a leading Systems Engineering Professor believes human potential will be realized by adopting a systems perspective (Worldview 2). He argues that Worldview 1 has placed limits on human versatility and creativity. By integrating what science knows about complex adaptive systems (i.e. people and organizations) offers new opportunities to transform human development. It involves:

- A solid grasp of Systems Thinking
- Enhanced Communication skills
- A deeper appreciation and skill in Leadership

The focus for learning about systems is observing oneself to build habits that naturally support desired qualities and competencies.



## Dynamic Change

### **Fifth Generation Management**

by Charles M Savage.  
Wiley 1996

Charles helps the reader understand how they can blend the colour and texture of one another's ideas through virtual enterprising, dynamic change, and knowledge networking.

### **The Democratic Enterprise**

by Lynda Gratton  
Prentice-Hall 2004

In this brilliant book Lynda creates a vision of a dynamic organization that is built around choice, trust, flexibility, shared purpose and commitment. She sees leaders as goal setters, creators of space, role models and coaches.

### **The Intelligence Advantage**

by Michael D McMaster us.  
ISBN 0-9525524-0-X 1995

This book is an excellent explanation of how the new sciences can be applied to help leaders organise for complexity. It's about seeing organisations as living organisms with intelligence and energy to design and create new realities. What I love about this book is the way it explores the possibility of organisations serving the people who work in them.

## Praxis – combining theory and action

*Drawing on the work of Fernando Flores and his understanding of cognition researched by cognitive biologist and philosopher Humberto Maturana.*

### **Changing States**

An Ontological Coach works like a designer of human states. Much depends on an understanding of how social reality is constructed by combining theory and practice. Theories about the nature of our biological existence (body), about the way we converse with each other (language) and the profound role of emotions in human action (mood). The result is a change in our 'state' or 'way of being'

Ontological change in human systems draws on the philosophical ideas of Martin Heidegger, Donald Schon and John Austin as well Humberto Maturana, Francisco Varela and Clare Graves – to mention but a few. Each comes from radically different traditions and cultures, yet they see a person's "way of being" as dynamic, changing in response to, and influenced by, language emotions and physiology. They share the view that we create our sense of reality through language, and that we actually "live in language" and need to use it effectively to establish a healthy and balanced interpretation of reality. A more detailed explanation can be found on my website - <http://www.ontological-coaching.co.uk/info/ontology.htm>

### **The Power of the Observer**

We know that changing our language, and not our emotional and physiological states, will make that change short lived. Julio Olalla of the Newfield Network argues that learning in the emotional field (re: trust, truth, respect, joy, gratitude, etc.) and how it affects our physical and spiritual wellbeing, holds to the key to achievable and sustainable change in our 'way of being'. We can observe emotional states in people's posture and muscle tension, but only from experience can we interpret and truly know what it means. It is not possible to test for internal change, only to observe it as external change. For example, evidence of learning has to be seen as a change of observable behaviour and/or the ability to make distinctions.

Humberto Maturana's biological concept of the "observer" helps us to make a fundamental distinction between a reality that is externally remembered and one that is internally constructed. The later being known as 'radical constructivism' (created by Ernst von Glasersfeld) where local and global phenomena are co-created – that is they emerge are embodied or situated in a context. This means that multiple dynamic perspectives are needed in order to get closer to what is real in any given cultural and physical setting (Vygotski). Hence the importance of conversation through large group interventions such as Open Space and Future Search. See previous newsletters

### **Moving from Observer to Creator**

Everything that is done is done by a creator, a person who observes themselves making observations so that they knowingly change their mental, physical or emotional states. Real change therefore requires us to be creative in changing our states and being able to observe them in our behaviour as it changes the quality of our actions.

More is explained in Humberto Maturana's paper on 'The Ontology of Observing'  
Go to: <http://www.inteco.cl/biology/ontology/index.htm>



## Forces for Change

### Change Forces

by Michael Fullan.

The Falmer Press 1996

This book looks at change dynamics from a learning Organisation perspective. In it Michael refers to inside-out and outside in learning viewed from the top-down and bottom-up. I will be exploring the content of this book in more detail in my next newsletter.

Land & Jarman in their book *'Breakpoint and Beyond'* refer to dynamic complexity as everyone existing within sets of interconnections with the world around them – systems within systems. Everything and everyone affects everything else. Our family, community, work environment and world are affected by our existence.

### Global Mind Change

by Willis Harman.

Berrett-Koehler 1998

Willis argues that we are living through a major shift in human history. It's power comes from a change of mind or shift of consciousness as people start to see themselves and their relationship with the planet differently. By changing their view of reality and their 'way of being' they are changing the world.

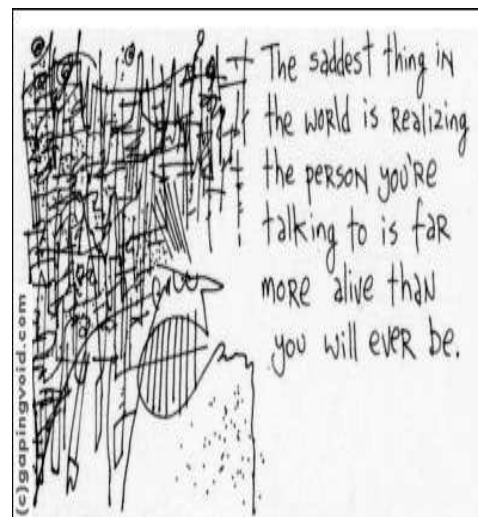
**NOTE:** See the work of Ken Wilbur, Clare Graves, Sydney Banks, Robert Dilts, Margaret Wheatley, Humberto Maturana and Fernando Flores in previous newsletters.

## The Power of Language

*Many have contributed to the philosophy of language. Here, I draw on the work of Wittgenstein, Austin, Searle and Habermas.*

We are often no more aware of the language we use than of the air we breathe. The distinctions we make are not just in the choice of words but in the meanings we give to them.

For more detail go to the ontology section at: <http://www.ontological-coaching.co.uk>



Courtesy of : <http://www.gapingvoid.com>

To begin to change anything we must change the way we speak about it. By doing so we make new distinctions that change our experience of it. This new experience changes the distinctions we can make next time and so the process becomes an interactive loop, or what is known as the 'linguistic turn'. Not only does language describe external reality, it also creates it and how we respond to it. In effect we 'live in language' - it constructs our world.

When people and their organisations fail to change, it is usually because little attention is paid to changing the language or to the meaning given to specific actions and responses in relationships. The way we communicate with customers outside should be reflected in the way we communicate with each other inside. Paying attention to the quality of the conversations is essential to getting the desired outcome. Yet again, the key process is change from the inside-out. This is ontological change and based on the power of the observer to describe the subtle differences that lead to finer distinctions. What can now be observed was somehow hidden from us before. We can only see what we are looking for.

From over 30 years experience as a change agent, working in organisations and diverse communities, little has changed in the way problems are described, the way challenges are spoken about and the way values are determined. Where it has been possible to change the language, particularly in team environments, change has been easier to achieve and sustain. Thinking in linear ways uses mechanistic language that prevents any systemic/creative thinking and transformational change.

Unless we become better observers of our use of language and its impact on others, we will fail to use words effectively to get action. To use language to get the results we want, we must learn a new grammar. John Austin's 'Linguistic Acts' are a good example. They are outlined in Newsletter Vol 1.3. It's worth noting that we give structure to reality through our choice of language, not the other way round.

Jurgen Habermas connected Speech Acts to the idea of rational constructivism – seeking to reach an understanding about an action that's needed in a given context, and then planning to coordinate or sequence those actions by way of agreements or promises. Wittgenstein's insight was that we can only understand 'linguistic acts' because they are embedded in contexts which are orientated towards an understanding based on a *"taken-for-granted background of personal assumptions and naively mastered skills"*.

## At the 'edge of becoming'



The 'open wave' can be found across the natural world in rocks, ferns and feathers . . .



in sea shells, waves . . . . .



in cyclones and hay rolls . . . . .



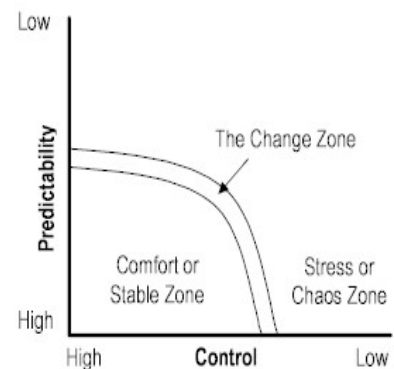
in mythology, folklaw and Quantum Mechanics.

The New Scientists are telling us that spaces with and between objects is not empty. It is filled with infinite potential to become anything the mind can imagine. Life follows the law of attraction. Just think it and the cosmos will create it for you.

## The Open Wave of Spiraling Possibilities

*The 'Open Wave' is drawn from the thinking of Julio Olalla, founder of the Newfield Network and Christopher Cooke, Philosopher and Personal Coach. They talk about it as the condition achieved before something new happens. I call it the Change Zone, a space where infinite possibilities can be generated before a new state emerges.*

To be fully alive we learn to live in the 'Change Zone', a zone of infinite possibilities from which a higher level of consciousness can emerge. Those who live in their 'Comfort Zone' are happy with stability, but this only leads to boredom and breakdown. Others push themselves to extremes where they get into difficulty. They do not have the capacity to deal with the information which change puts them in a 'Stress Zone' fearing breakdown. Learning to live in The Change Zone is dynamic because new possibilities are always emerging.



We seek to control the resources and the people around us to ensure predictability. We organise for reliability. But this is not a viable strategy in a world that is constantly changing and becoming more dynamic and complex. We are under pressure to evolve and adapt if we are to avoid disastrous breakdowns. That's why dealing with complex change requires transformation. Continuing to do what we always have just gets us what we always got. Because the implications of a new way of doing things is unknown beforehand it requires us to welcome inevitable breakdowns as opportunities for learning, exploring new possibilities and balancing competing forces in order to find new 'ways of being'.

To live in the Change Zone is to be curious about what could be. Possibilities emerge without much effort because, as Bob Proctor observes "*what you see in your mind, you're going to hold in your hand*" – such is the power of intention. Christopher Cooke believes we need to "*look more deeply at the dynamics of change to understand the conditions for change so that space can be created to remove the emotional barriers*".

On a personal level we often seem to create breakdowns by the way we behave or decide to see things. Things happen to us that seem beyond our control, things that threaten or challenge us to break down or break through. Our ability to think and act powerfully affects how we respond to the threat of breakdown. Blaming others is simply failing to accepting that we have the **power and the responsibility** to rise to the challenge of change. This is scary for some minds and an exciting prospect for others. Being open to the seemingly impossible is not an easy choice to make.

My own Dynamic Change Model offers a multi-dimensional approach to dealing with complex situations and to learn about what's involved in personal and organisational transformation. The features and benefits of my model will be outlined in the next Newsletter Vol 1.6. It is less a model of change and more a framework for learning how to bring coherence to situations and people so that a breakthrough rather than a breakdown is a more likely outcome.



## Managing Complexity

**Deep Simplicity – chaos, complexity and the emergence of life**

by John Gribbin  
Penguin 2005

Whilst the world around us can be seen as a complex, confusing place it is actually based on simple laws of cause and effect, like a line of falling dominos where the energy is passed on from one to another.

### Tools for Thought

by C H Waddington  
Paladin 1997

This book is an excellent introduction to Complex Systems. The author comments "We are now confronted by a complex of complexes and complexity science is helping us to develop new tools for thought."

### How to Think

by Stephen Reid  
Prentice Hall 2002

A major contribution to managing ambiguity, complexity and interdependence. This thought provoking book brings fresh air into old thinking about change and how to make it work for us in teams and organisations.

*"The true journey of discovery does not consist of searching for new territories, but in having new eyes"*  
Marcel Proust

## Book Review

### A Whole Mind

by Dan Pink. Published by Cyan Press 2006

This is a mind changing book. In it, Dan identifies six characteristics that will enable you to thrive and live a joyful and fulfilling life in a global, computerised and competitive world.

They are:

- Designing** – for homes, holidays, lives . . . .
- Storying** – for promotion, identity and self-understanding . . .
- Symphony** – for invention, coherence, integrated functions . . .
- Empathy** – for healing, mentoring, caring . . . .
- Playing** – for learning, relationships, recreation, work . . .
- Meaning** – vision, spirituality, life purpose, appreciation . . .

All of the above characteristics would suggest a key role for coaching in the years to come, as the opportunity to serve the need to learn and achieve self-realisation. Big picture thinking then becomes an integral part of our everyday lives. Dan argues that major forces are taking us into a "right-brain" economy, and we need to shape the above characteristics to secure success in tomorrow's complex world.

They are:

- Abundance** – cars, excess storage, shopping, luxury goods . . .
- Automation** – low costs, outsourcing, automation, computerisation . . . .

## Tools: Clean Space and Clean Language

**Anthropologist David Grove was the originator of Clean Language and an innovator of many processes working with metaphor. Clean Space uses the process of emergence to model human perception.**

More info at: <http://www.davidgrove.com/>

*"It is fast becoming clear that our lives revolve around the powers of emergence. Complex problems are solved by a profusion of relatively simple elements. Order arrives from the bottom-up, not top-down."* David Grove



It was Penny Tompkins and James Lawley developed Clean Space after observing David Grove facilitating individuals in small groups.



This couple are today's experts in the theory of metaphor, self-organising systems and symbolic modelling and facilitating psycho-therapeutic process. Go to: <http://www.cleanlanguage.co.uk>

The Clean Space experience is being used throughout the world in organisations such as NASA and Government Agencies. I experienced it at the Findhorn Foundation in Scotland where I found it to be a very powerful technique for exploring different perceptions around a common goal or issue. I am now a practitioner.