The social construction of organizational change paradoxes

Lotte S. Luscher (Psychology Department, University of Aarhus, Aarhus, Denmark)
Marianne Lewis (College of Business, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA)
Amy Ingram (College of Business, University of Cincinnati, Cincinnati, Ohio, USA)

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Abstract

Purpose
The purpose of this paper is to explain how paradox has become a common label for the organizational complexity, ambiguity and equivocality accentuated by change.

Design/methodology/approach
As a label, paradox is socially constructed – the product of actors' daily discourses. Applying a constructivist lens and insights from systems theories, the paper explores the nature and dynamics of paradox related to changing organizations. Building from related studies, the paper proposes a framework that details recurring paradoxes, their communicative sources, and their paradoxical interplay. This action research study of the Lego Company provides an integrative example.

Findings
Most organizational phenomena that one makes the subject of study are brought out through our own social interactions. Processes and product are two sides of the same coin. Exploring paradoxes often creates circles of reflection. An understanding of paradox does not solve problems, but rather opens new possibilities and sparks circles of even greater complexity.

Originality/value
The paper provides a critique of “resolution”, identifying responses to paradox that may energize change.

Keywords
Organizational change, Role ambiguity

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Organisational change refers to any alteration that occurs in the total work environment. Organisational change is an important characteristic of most organisations. An organisation must develop adaptability to change otherwise it will either be left behind or be swept away by the forces of change. Organisational change is inevitable in a progressive culture. Modern organisations are highly dynamic, versatile and adaptive to the multiplicity of changes. Organisational change refers to the alteration of structural relationships and roles of people in the organization. It is largely structural in nature.

The paradoxical social change theory proposed here is based on the strategies developed by Perls in his Gestalt therapy. They are applicable, in the judgment of this author, to community organization, community development and other change processes consistent with the democratic political framework. If you enjoyed the "Paradoxical Theory of Change," you might also enjoy reading Gestalt therapist Ruth Lampert's award-winning essay, "The Case for Going Gentle," that was inspired by her training with Dr. Beisser.