**PERFORMING CHANGE**

**A Dramaturgical Approach to the Practice of Managing Change**

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*“I’m floating around on an ice cube that’s melting in the toilet’,[[1]](#footnote-2)*

Burke, James Lee, 2005, *Heaven’s Prisoners*, Phoenix, New York *p.226*

**1. Introduction: A Phronetic Art!**

Once we enter the discourse of ‘managing change’, we are far from the more restricted analysis of ‘organizational change’. We enter the sphere of action, judgement and decision, and the imperatives of practice. In classical Aristotelean terms, this is not the sphere of *episteme*, or even *techne*, but of *phronesis* – a wisdom in the doing (Flyvjberg, 2001; Eikeland, 2007; Antonacopoulou, 2010). There is no guarantee that an accumulation of knowledge about how change works, its nature and dynamics (*episteme*), will provide any useful knowledge about how to influence it. It may be that as one of the founders of contemporary theories of managing change, Kurt Lewin (1964: 169), put it, ‘There is nothing so practical as a good theory’, but if that *is* the case, then it is a theory that has to be translated, put to work and made to perform (Czarniawska-Joerges and Sevon, 1996; Latour, 1993). There is, similarly, no assurance that the provision of technical knowledge, in the form of procedures, rules and principles for manipulation and control (*techne*), will actually be used effectively and appropriately in context. There is always a ‘phronetic gap’ between what rules prescribe and situations demand (Taylor, 1995; Tsoukas, 2005). It is arguably a recognition of the dangers of this gap that lies at the heart of any meaningful treatment of ‘managing change’ (Badham, 2006b). Managing organizational change, in the sense of attempts to influence the changing nature of institutions (Badham, 2006a), is a complex situational practice, and one that requires wisdom, in the form of mindfulness, reflexivity and discipline, if it is to be effective.

In making this argument, the chapter adopts a phronetic view of managing change. Taken as a *discipline of influencing oneself and others to achieve a purpose*, it is both deeply personal and highly institutional, a proximate phronetic art embedded in situated life-worlds not a distal technical rationality (Cooper and Law, 1995). Performing effectively requires practical artfulness, disciplined creativity, serious play and engaged distance.

A key challenge for theories of managing change, in this sense, is how to explore and inform such a complex situational practice. Any academic contribution to phronetic knowledge arguably needs to satisfy three requirements. Firstly, capturing the theoretical and empirical depth and richness of the literature on organisational change and its management. Secondly, adopting a theoretically informed and pragmatically relevant sensitivity to the nature and demands of practice. Thirdly, providing systematic support for reflective practice.

This is a substantial challenge, especially for a chapter length discussion of the topic. We will thus inevitably be restricted to providing suggestive guidelines rather than a definitive statement for how this might be addressed. In a sense, this chapter offers a set of theoretically informed yet experimental ‘probes’ in wrestling with the problem. In the spirit of phronesis, however, we would argue that the ‘practical’ political and ethical importance of the task overcomes the epistemic and technical limitations of such an enterprise.

The paper introduces three such ‘probes’. Firstly, it explores how the literature on managing change may be translated into a set of heuristics. The particular characterisation of such heuristics is inevitably suggestive and illustrative in character, and should be treated as such. It does, however, provide some initial potential guidelines to help support a phronetic change management practice. Secondly, it provides a brief introduction to the context in which such guidelines can be put to use, that of managing change-as-practice, drawing on the recent contributions of the ‘practice turn’ in organisational studies. Thirdly, it elaborates and argues for the value of a ‘dramaturgical’ approach to developing a practice-based phronetic knowledge.

**2. Conversations, Heuristics and the Literature on Managing Change**

In the face of questions raised about the contribution of organisational studies, and internal and external demands for relevance, a number of leading scholars have argued strongly for ‘fruitful dialogues’ (Reed and Hughes, 1992); constructive ‘conversations’ (Van Maanen, 1995); enriching ‘bricolages’ (Bolman and Deal, 1997) and a focused wrestling with key ‘anomalies’ (Willmott, 1993) and ‘paradoxes’ (Lewis and Kelemen, 2002). From the perspectives of a phronetic approach to knowledge, a valuable approach to generating such a conversation is the suggestive creation of relatively open and flexible heuristics in the sense of those described in Schon's reflection-on-action (1983, 1987). The term heuristics derives from the Greek, 'heuriskein', to find or discover. It describes the "discovery of meaning and essence in significant human experience" in intrapersonal, interpersonal or, possibly more appropriately named, ‘transpersonal’ research (Douglass & Moustakas, 1985, p.40) mechanisms to deal with complexity, limited time and inadequate mental resources in decision making (Kahneman, 2003; Simon, 1957); and phrases, models or metaphors which enable understanding, particularly of human responses to problems in the social environment or ecology (Marsh, 2002; Schön, 1983, 1987). Drawing on experiences and understandings generated through reflection on previous social actions, the explicit creation of performance heuristics, has value as logic of knowledge development and presentation for this conversation and lays a foundation for supporting reflective practice.

*The Traditional Discourse of Change Management*

With an established history extending back beyond ancient Greece, and well over a million contemporary articles on the subject the management of change is, literally, a voluminous subject and not one amenable to easy reduction as a set of heuristics (Poole, Van de Ven, Dooley, and Holmes, 2000, p.57 f.n.). Any overview of this discourse is also inevitably subject to controversy and debate (Cooke, 1999; Sturdy and Morgan, 2000; Zorn, 2005). Yet it is hopefully possible, without being excessively contentious, to roughly characterise mainstream post-WW2 research and education on managing change as proceeded through three contributory stages. These stages overlap, are not exclusive and should not be interpreted as a form of intellectual ‘epochalism’ (du Gay, 2003), and are restricted to the ‘conventional wisdom’ within mainstream studies of managing change.

Firstly, following the classic work in the 1940s and 1950s of Kurt Lewin (1943; 1964), Edgar Schein (1951) and L.Coch & J.R.French (1948), the initial focus was on planned organisational change within an organisational development framework. While attention was focused on individual, group and organisational level change, much of the organisational development approach was at the group/individual level, with a particular focus on overcoming resistance to change. Managing change was often presented as a matter of expert facilitation, providing education and involvement strategies and techniques for surfacing resistant beliefs, habits and emotions, and managing groups through a staged process of unfreezing, moving and refreezing (French, Bell, and Zawacki, 2004).

Secondly, as represented in the work of Rosabeth Moss Kanter (1983) and John Kotter (1996) in the US, Andrew Pettigrew (1985) in the UK and Dexter Dunphy (Dunphy and Stace, 1992) in Australia, greater attention was paid from the 1980s onwards to transformational organisational change, the implementation of strategy, and managing the complex processes and politics of strategic change from a broad human resource management perspective (Dawson, 1994). During this period, greater attention was paid to the coercive, as well as, participatory dimension of change, and the leadership skills in managing politics, complexity and process (Buchanan and Boddy, 1992; Buchanan and Badham, 2008 1st Edition 1999).

Thirdly, most prominently within academic discourse on organisational behaviour, the 1990s onwards saw the growth and widespread acceptance of more improvisatory and sense-making perspectives on change, more political and politicised views of the purposes and methods of programmatic change, and greater attention to the role of metaphors and frames underlying theoretical frameworks, and the intellectual and pragmatic difficulties involved in handling the paradoxical, complex and chaotic nature of change (e.g. Palmer and Dunford, 2005; Brown and Eisenhardt, 1998; Beer and Nohria, 2000; Burnes, 2000; Stacey, 2007; Collins, 1998; Morgan and Sturdy, 2000).

The first classical ‘episodic’ view of planned organisational change established managing change as a field of study, intellectual discipline and management specialisation. By ‘episodic’ here is meant a classical view of the difference between the study and management of the dynamic phases or stages of ‘change’ and the static orderly nature of routine organisational operations. Once this ‘episodic’ view was broken down, with more fluid views of organisations as *organising* (Gabriel, Fineman and Sims, 2000) and change as ongoing *changing* (Weick and Quinn, 1999) and *becoming (*Tsoukas and Chia, 2002), then it became more difficult and controversial to identify ‘managing change’ as a separate area of inquiry, intervention and practice. This has been accompanied by more general criticism of the weaknesses of traditional formal, rational and autocratic views of management, and a greater recognition of the importance of the informal, emotional, supportive and inspirational nature of organisational leadership. In combination, these developments have at one and the same time paradoxically brought into question the status of managing change as a discrete area of inquiry and activity at the same time as it has increased recognition of the importance of the areas traditionally covered by managing change (e.g. dynamics, impacts and expectations of change, frame-breaking and group dynamics, managing expectations and handling anxiety and fear, impression management and influence techniques, managing power and politics, learning and experimentation and so on).

As a result, despite the breakdown of ‘managing change’ as a discrete activity and specialisation, there is a common view of its importance as: an ongoing feature of rapidly changing nature of contemporary organisations, as part of the responsibilities of human resource management and development in organisations, as a core capability of senior managers, as a component expertise or specialisation of a growing range of consultants, as well as continuing as an academic specialisation on ‘organisational development and change’.

It has not, however, been without its critics. Apart from criticisms of its ‘non-disciplinary’ nature, there have also been more critical reviews of its political and politicised character (Cooke, 1999; McLoughlin, Badham and Palmer, 2005), as well as the superficiality of much of its knowledge base, purported techniques and practical interventions (Collins,1998, 2004; Morgan and Sturdy, 2000; Sturdy and Grey, 2003; Sturdy and Morgan, 2003; Buchanan and Badham, 2008).

If managing change is an important and complex phronetic art – and enduringly so - where does this extant literature, activities and debates leave us? As argued above, managing change in practice involves themindful (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001) application of maxims and heuristics rather than the strict following of rules (Taylor, 1995), careful judgements about the relevance of cases and precedents rather than simply applying the lessons of business history, and ongoing reflection *in* and *on* an inevitably experimental process and practice (Argyris and Schon, 1974; Sztompka, 1999). Can the literature on managing change be used to support such activities? As illustrated in Zander and Zander (2000) ‘toes to nose’ story and Dopson’s (1997) re-narrating of Edgar Allan Poe’s ‘fisherman in the maelstrom’, simple and useable guides rather then tightly prescriptive methods are of key importance in navigating on the ‘edge of chaos’ (Stacey, 2007). Whether we draw on a Machiavellian tradition rejecting social ‘science’ in favour of pragmatic guidelines for ‘realpolitik’ (Latour, 1988) or a ‘sensemaking’ view of the centrality of maps despite the irreducible gap between the ‘map and the territory’ (Weick, 2001), the outcome is the same: reflective practitioners require pragmatic heuristics and guidelines.

Is it possible, therefore, to stimulate creative, practical and reflective conversations about how to manage change drawing on the established literature on managing change? Can this literature be used to inform the creative development of heuristics, shorn of some of the more restrictive and controversial academic packaging of theory, data and methods as established ‘epistemic knowledge’ or universal change ‘techniques’? Table 1 represents one way in which some of these themes may be drawn out. It is intended for illustrative purposes only, to show how established literature may be drawn upon to create and reflect upon useful heuristics *not* (at least in this chapter) to argue for the precision and value of the particular examples chosen.

**TABLE 1 CHANGE HEURISTICS**

**Epistemic/Techne *Orthodoxy*** **Phronetic *Heterodoxy***

*Organisational Development and Planned Organizational Change*

* Applied Technique Action Research
* Rigid Stage Theory Three ‘Phases’ of Change
* Simple Change Tools e.g. Forcefield Diagnosis
* Therapeutic Science e.g. Surface Undiscussables
* One-Way Participative Change e.g. Coercive Persuasion

*Human Resource Development and Strategy Implementation*

* Lightweight Analysis Change as Process
* Designer Forms and Stages Emergent Strategy
* Design Contingencies Participative & Coercive Strategies
* One Best Way Creative Enterprise

*Organisational Behaviour and Reframing Change*

* No Checklists Organizing and Changing
* Uncritical Pluralism Frames of Change
* Negativism Managerialism & Politics
* Academic Arrogance Consultancy, Fads & Fashions
* Systemic Chaos Theory Complexity and Paradox

In the first phase of managing change, many OD consultants, practitioners and even academic writers interpreted the complex writings of such founding figures as Lewin, Argyris and Schein (Burnes, 2000) through the lenses of scientific discovery of ‘laws’ or the establishment of rules for technical ‘engineering’. In crude form, this viewed OD knowledge as applied technique tailored to help individuals and organisations through the fixed universal three stages of change. This was associated with the application of simple change tools, and a view of managing change theory as a therapeutic science, implementing strategies for involvement and participation.

As a looser set of heuristics supporting ‘practical’ knowledge and overcoming the limitations of traditional rationalistic perspectives on implementation, however, OD introduced the idea of pragmatic, experimental, action-research as a form of knowledge and learning, opening up the use of the idea of three ‘phases’ of change not as a rigid theory but as a flexible mindful counterpoint to simple ‘two-stage’ views of change as a rational activity of design-implementation or instruction-compliance. Rather than imposing simple change tools, OD can be seen as providing a set of situational heuristics, such as the ‘forcefield’ analysis, with a simplicity that enables groups to address issues not often surfaced yet with a practical complexity that requires sophisticated handling and use. Rather than being restricted to an organic ‘thereapeutic’ science, and the imposition of one-dimensional participation strategies, it draws attention to the controversial and complex political-psychological issues involved in surfacing ‘undiscussables’ in organisations, and the ‘coercive’ as well as ‘participatory’ nature of individual/group ‘persuasion’ methods and practices.

In this latter sense, Lewin’s established ‘unfreezing’, ‘moving’ and ‘refreezing’ model of change, if used as a rough initial entrée into capturing and addressing the dynamics of ‘transition rituals’ (Turner, 1982), then it can be drawn upon without exaggerated views of an organisation as ‘ice cube’ (Kanter, Stein and Jick, 1992), or as change having to proceed through any rigid sequence of simple, unlinear, non-overlapping phases. Similarly, Schein’s (1988) classic study of the complex psychological dynamics of deliberate unfreezing, moving, refreezing as a sophisticated paradoxical process of ‘coercive persuasion’ is of value, while one-best way analysis of participation and involvement as *the* key to overcoming resistance to change is partial and limited at best. Argyris’s (1990) exploration of the reasons, tactics and strategies for OD specialists to ‘surface undiscussables’ is a crucial area of investigation and inquiry, but serious recognition needs to be given to his observation that this is a skill and capability that is not attained by many, and not a simple therapeutic science or method. Finally, action research provides a set of models for an ongoing, iterative, experimental approach to addressing the complex demands of action and learning in practice, rather than being regarded as an applied technique for solving organisational problems (Cooperrider and Srivastva, 1997).

The second phase of the managing change literature introduced the dual focus on strategic human resource management and the adoption of a more processual and political view of change. At the level of establishing an episteme of change and a techne of change techniques, this imposed a relatively lightweight characterisation of the change process as an interaction between content, context and politics, new fixed typologies of change and stages of change, rigid views of designer change strategies appropriate to situational contingencies, and new ‘one best way’ models of how to handle the challenges of change. As a contribution to an expanded set of heuristics of change challenging rationalistic orthodoxy, however, it encouraged recognition and reflection on the complex processual nature of change (Pettigrew, 1997), the emergent contextual nature of strategy development and implementation (Brown and Eisenhardt, 1998) and the recognition of situation specific blends of coercion and participation in bringing about strategic change (Beer and Nohria, 2000), and the nature and value of entrepreneurial creativity in handling the complex uncertainties and confrontational politics of change (Buchanan and Badham, 2008).

The third phase extended the depth of understanding of processual and paradoxical dimensions of managing change, as well as the social and political character of the perspectives and methods that are deployed. Through the lens of traditional episteme, this has resulted in a greater understanding of the complexities of organisational becoming. The contribution has not, however, been so extensive in translating and extending this epistemic contribution into phronetic knowledge. It has often provided little advice on how to handle the complexity that is observed. In some cases, this has been accompanied by an uncritical pluralism in accepting diverse ‘frames’ of change. In a number of cases, it has been restricted in its phronetic potential by not going beyond academic ‘debunking’ or a critical negativity towards simplistic consultancy methods or restricted management politics. For others, , it has involved adopting scientistic approaches such as ‘chaos theory’ as a new epistemic and technical solution to handling complexity.

In phronetic terms, however, if a sophisticated recognition of the complex nature of organisational becoming means ‘no checklists’ then the need for practical guidance is avoided. An equally uncritical negativism towards managerial initiatives can misrepresent as well as immobilise action. The critique of fads and fashions can lead to an academic arrogance that fails to capture the context and value of heuristics while offering little advice itself. Recognition of multiple frames can lead to a simplistic acceptance of pluralistic insights without any basis for identifying deploying and blending such frames. Finally, recognition of uncertainty and chaos has led to a recommendation to apply the insights of scientific ‘chaos theory’ as an expert ‘solution’. In this way, it may, in a different guise, end up restricting its value in making practitioners face up to and address the enduring gap between aspirations and achievements. In this way, as an uncritical view of such a ‘scientific’ theory could end up restricting its potential as an ongoing reminder to practitioners to be mindful of irremovable complexity and the difficulties and discomforts of acting effectively in the face of irreducible uncertainty.

As a heterodox contribution to phronetic heuristics, however, this era was marked by encouraging reflective support for ‘managing the unexpected’ character of organizing and changing (Orlikowski, 1996; Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001) , taking into account the need to handle the conflicting framing of change by change initiators and recipients (Orlikowski and Gash, 1994), the value yet complexity of extending the discussion of political ‘undiscussables’ in creating effective and persuasive change rituals (Argyris, 1990), serious consideration in change of the social dynamics of consultancy rhetoric’s and practices (Clark and Fincham, 2001; Whittle, 2006), and the issues, mindset and social supports necessary to address rather than deny complexity and paradox when operating on the ‘edge of chaos’. (Stacey, 2007).

Table 1, and this all too brief discussion of the outlined heuristics, is only intended to be illustrative and suggestive in character. It does, however, capture some key change insights and their relevance for any serious exploration of the practice or phronesis integral to managing change. Any significant further development and use of heuristics does, however, need to be firmly grounded in an understanding of the nature of managing change as a *social practice.*

**3. Managing Change-in-Practice**

Our point of departure in adopting a social practice perspective is to join the conversation in the growing debate that has come to be referred to as the ‘practice-turn’ in organization studies (Schatzki, Knorr-Cetina & Von Savigny, 2001). This debate has sensitized us to practice as a lens for reinterpreting a variety of organizational activities, such as learning (Gherardi & Nicolini, 2002; Brown & Duguid 2000), strategy (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson et al., 2003) and technology (Dougherty, 2004; Orlikowski, 2000) to name but a few. Even institutional change has been re-examined through the practice lens (Seo and Creed; 2002).

One of the ongoing challenges facing this ‘practice-turn’ is an ongoing lack of clarity about exactly what practice means, with different perspectives focusing on action, social context, knowing, activity systems, structures and so on (Antonacopoulou, 2007). At the same time, however, practice studies has been successful in sensitizing organizational studies to the complexity of ‘rule following’ in action, the importance of understanding the interactions, relationships and contexts within which action occurs, and the complex, tentative and experimental nature of action and reflections on action. For practice studies, rules are, as Taylor (1993: 50) puts it, ‘islands in the sea of our unformulated practical grasp on the world’. A key tenet is, as Gadamer succinctly remarks, that ‘the application of rules can never be done by rules’. Practical wisdom and judgement is needed to interpret, adjudicate and adapt rules in the context of their application. (Gadamer 1980): 823). This inevitably takes the form of what Pickering (1995: 22) dramatically represents as the ‘mangle of practice’, an inherently experimental 'practical, goal-oriented and goal-revising dialectic of resistance and accommodation'.

What, however, do these basic insights of practice studies mean for the management of change, and the use of the heuristics outlined above? In addition, of specific concern for the present chapter, in what ways does it support or contribute to a dramaturgical understanding of change and its management? In exploring these questions, we will draw strongly on Antonacopolou’s (2003; 2007; 2008; 2010a; 2010b) overview of practice studies and development of these key practice studies assumptions through the key concepts of practise, ex-tension and reflexive critique.

At a base level, all areas of social practice are to varying degrees pragmatic, focused, disciplined and repetitive. They are constituted not just by the individual actions of practitioners but also by the collective interactions, stocks of knowledge, and more or less institutionalised relationships that make up any significant area of social and organisational life. From such a practice perspective, any discussion of managing change needs to consider two dimensions of social practice.

The first dimension is that all significant areas of organisational life are deliberate, habitual and *repetitive* in character. This should not be understood, however, as involving simple *replication* or predictable institutionalisation. Reproduction is inevitably accompanied by a degree of adaptation, emergence and improvisation in context. Practice is governed by what MacIntyre (1985) calls internal and external ‘goods’, and practical judgement is always required to handle conflicts, contingencies and inevitable tensions between alternative demands. In the process, new developments, possibilities and potentials emerge, in the very act of habitual repetition. In this sense, all practice is a process of more or less unpredictable and uncontrolled becoming.

During this becoming, tensions develop into ‘ex-tensions’ (Antonacopolou, 2008). In the course of addressing inevitable ambiguity, uncertainty and conflict in context, practice creates new possibilities that point beyond existing habitual patterns of cognitive understanding, moral legitimation and power relationships. Inherent in repetition is, therefore, what Heidegger refers to as ‘shocks’ or what the Greeks called *κρήσις* (krisis – critique – being critical). All interaction involves individual and collective sense-making (Weick,2001). However, this process inevitably involves ‘sense-giving’ as well as ‘sense-making’ in an ongoing process of negotiated interpretation and understanding (Strauss,1978). It also includes ‘sense-breaking’ as well as ‘sense-making’ as traditional assumptions and behaviours are challenged in the very course of their application.

What this means for managing change, is that change is not viewed as episodic events, deliberate or otherwise, occurring between periods of stability and reproduction. It is, rather, an ongoing process. Moreover, this process of change is a complex one, conscious *and* tacit, reproductive *and* challenging, improvising *and* disciplined and focused by tradition. Managing change is, therefore, an ongoing component of all practical action, involving the more or less reflective adaptation to shifting conditions, response to emergence and handling of new possibilities and developments.

Secondly, managing change involves conscious reflection on how this process of ongoing ‘changing’ occurs, and deliberate action in attempting to influence its outcomes. In this regard, it involves *practi****s****e* (understood as improving one’s skill) as well as *practice* (in the sense of doing something). Practise is, also, more than *praxis* (action/activity), as it inevitably involves *phronesis* (practical judgement, virtuous modes of knowing). The idea of phronesis is based on the understanding that all practice involves intentionality. This is not understood in technocratic terms as simply applying means to achieve pre-given goals. It involves grappling with the complex shuffling of means and ends in a process of continuity and emergence, habitual action and disruptive crises and possibilities. This intentionality is not only individual and pragmatic, but also collective, moral and political. It intertwines the personal and the social, the cognitive and the emotional, the technical and the political. It involves what the classical Greeks called paideia (pedevo – παιδεύω) i.e struggling, exerting great effort to achieve something, and with passion – *a labour of love.*

From such a practi*s*e perspective, understanding and improving how change is managed involves a *reflexive critique* of existing practice. Reflexive critique is grounded in empirical praxis. Empirical here is used in the classical sense of the word (from the Greek ‘*Εμπειρία’*, empiria) meaning experience. Reflexive critique explores the relationship between established practice, intention and practical judgement. It addresses the goal (or *telos)* as well as the routinesof *praxis*, and reflectively explores the practical judgements (*phronesis*) that are being made. In the face of the emergent possibilities inherent in all areas of emergent practice, reflexive critique is more than the potentially restricted habituated reflection in/on action. It is also an ongoing search to create new connections and possibilities, and involves *egrigorsi* (alertness, mindfulness), encouraging change and progress by avoiding complacency. In the Greek tradition of *paideia*, the development and application of such capabilities, is more than a matter of *educating* (i.e. guiding the young and inexperienced) but involves a mature critical reflexivity pursued as part of ongoing self-development and fulfillment.

What this means for managing change-in-practice is that the use of the kinds of heuristics outlined in the previous section should not be seen as mere ‘application’. Changing is an inherent and emergent component of all practical action, and in an important sense uncontrolled and uncontrollable, however sophisticated or skillfully the heuristics of ‘managing change’ are applied. In addition, the experience of deliberately and consciously attempting to influence changing practices and institutions, is itself a complex practice. Improvement in this practice is only brought about through mindful and critical reflection, through an ongoing practi*s*e, that is personal as well as institutional, ethical and political as well as pragmatic. A crucial issue for management education, therefore, is how to provide concepts and environments that can support such a practi*s*e. It is our argument in this chapter that the dramaturgical view of organisational life as a *dramatic performance* is well-suited to this task[[2]](#footnote-3). In line with Tsoukas’ (2009) advocacy for ‘self-distanciation’ in practice, it is argued that it helps to provide both a creative reflective distance from actions, roles and responsibilities, and an extensive analytical repertoire for analysing and handling situational demands and performance requirements and activities.

**4. A Dramaturgical Perspective on Managing Change**

In its view of life as a dramatic performance, dramaturgy performs the valuable task of revealing the *acting in action*, the *performing in performance*, and the *drama in the doing*. It makes and allows a separation between the ‘actor’ and the ‘action’, the ‘person’ and the ‘part’ (‘character’, ‘job’ or ‘role’) that he or she plays. In so doing, it draws attention to action as a means of *ex*pression, a donning of a ‘mask’ that may be more or less internally and personally expressive and externally credible and convincing. It also highlights the *im*pression created by a performance, focusing on the fact that tasks and responsibilities are fulfilled for an audience or audiences, and that influencing and persuading such audiences is a key component of all performance. In a sense, it addresses acting and performing as a more or less effective blend of ‘*ex*pression’ and ‘*im*pression’ management. Finally, it emphasises the purposive, meaningful, personal and suspenseful character of agency and practice. It highlights the degree to which intellect and emotion are intertwined in the narrative framing of events and their expected and desired outcomes. But why are such insights so central for a phronetic approach to managing change? Why dramaturgy?

The first answer lies in the overlapping *pragmatic* objectives of both discourses or enterprises. As incorporated in our earlier definition of managing change, the focus of managing change is on what Pfeffer (1994) refers to as the crucial ‘skills of getting things done’ (in contrast to ‘figuring out what to do’) i.e. the realisation of purposes, ensuring execution rather than creating designs, implementing rather than developing strategy. While such a focus is eminently reasonable, and pragmatic, it is at the same time antithetical to the rationalistic ethos prominent within modern organisations.

This rationalistic ethos is, in various complex and overlapping forms, embedded in the guiding ethos and legitimating rationale of later modern organisational life. In terms of established Western dualities, it prioritises calculation over intuition, reason over passion, order over ambiguity, mind over body, science over art, thinking over doing and so on (Weber, 1997; Bell, 1996; Bauman, 2000). When, ‘rationally’, attention is focused on the necessity and value of execution, the rationalistic ethos naturally provides a rationalistic solution – searching for techniques, formulae and orderly controls capable of addressing the problem. In traditional change management terms, such an approach gives a strongly rationalistic slant to Lewin’s view of managing change as action research - preparing, leading and reviewing organisational change. In classical rational task-based project management terms, this is viewed in terms of *planning projects*, *executing tasks* and *evaluating outcomes*. For the effective conduct of these tasks, required *change roles* need to be allocated to those with the required *change agency* skills and capabilities. These are seen primarily in terms of defining formal roles, allocating responsibilities and then knowledgeably applying change management techniques. In essence, in line with an established tradition of technocratic social science, managing change is understood as a social ‘master-technique’ to ensure the orderly and progressive introduction of other techniques (Badham, 1986; Badham, 2006a).

A dramaturgical approach provides a valuable counter to this response. In common with pragmatist philosophy, the dramaturgical approach challenges the idea of managing change as applied technique. It places central emphasis on the complex, situational, embedded, uncertain and judgemental nature of required knowledge-in-practice, knowledge that lies at the heart of ‘getting things done’. This knowledge is ‘up close and personal’, tacit as much as explicit, bodily and emotive as much as mental, frustratingly ‘proximate’ rather than coolly ‘distal’, (Cooper and Law, 1995) and more about ‘know how’ rather than ‘know that’ (Ryle, 2000). As Denzin (1992: 26) emphasises, the dramaturgical tradition is less focused on ‘why’ questions and more on ‘how’ action occurs as events unfold in ‘negotiated, situated, temporal, biographical, emergent, and taken-for-granted processes.’

What dramaturgy integrates with this anti-rationalistic pragmatic view of knowledge, however, is it’s second major contribution: an *interpretive and interactionist* view of such processes as situated action. Managing change, as with all areas of organisational life, is viewed as occurring in and through a series of interactively narrated *episodic encounters* (Harre and Secord, 1973; Goffman, 1961). ‘Global’ macro-structures, technologies and environments and ‘local’ micro-action, interpretation and motivation are interdependent abstractions from the lived experience of such encounters.

In terms of a dramaturgical ‘spin’ on Lewin’s managing change as action research, it is focused on the core activities of *preparing*, *handling* and *reflecting* upon the interactional dynamics that lie at the core of change-in-practice. As encounters, change situations are characterised by the interactional dynamics of actors and audiences as they iteratively present and receive definitions of the participants and the situation they are in (Edgley, 2003). Change agents are involved in handling multiple expectations and counter-expectations, conflicting and shifting frames, and contested and emergent accounts and motives. As episodes, such situations are more or less ritualised in character, interpreted through more or less established narratives and stories, and involve plots and ceremonies marking their beginning, middle and end. As a particular case in point, change agents are required to understand and handle ‘ritualising’ (Collins, 2004) - the uncertainty, anxiety and drama of a constellation of ‘transition rituals’ (Turner, 1982). They are also required to organise *preparation* and *reflection* upon such ritualising processes. In preparing the change ritual, they are inevitably involved in all the complexity of ‘plotting’ a ritual outcome that is as subject to unpredictability as the estimated course of a sailing ship buffeted by the wind and the tides. Change agents are involved in mapping out a territory in a manner that as much *imposes* as *uncovers* dramatic plots, and is as concerned in the complex intrigues of ‘plotting’ as rationalistic exercises in project planning. Similarly, in promoting reflection, change managers are involved in the disruptive and challenging process of uncovering and surfacing taken-for-granted assumptions and behaviours amongst participants in the change process itself, overcoming cognitive, emotive and political defensiveness and denial. In this process, they act as catalysts, instigating the creative experimentation necessary to successfully ‘practise’ (Antonacopoulou, 2008) and make *learning-in-practise*. a reality.

In this context, the fulfilment of *change roles* is not simply or primarily a matter of defining roles and allocating responsibilities for formally managing change. It requires the use of rhetoric, negotiation and entrepreneurial creativity in confronting the conflicting expectations, frames and interests in situational encounters. In this context, change *agency* is less a matter of technique than it is about *acting mindfully* in the face of situational complexity (March, 2006; Weick, 2001), predictable irrationality (Ariely, 2008) and the frequently unexpected (Weick and Sutcliffe, 2001). It also involves *mobilising power -* acquiring resources, building coalitions and overcoming powerlessness – in order to overcome the inevitable obstacles to getting things done in episodic encounters (Strauss, 1978; Buchanan and Badham, 2008).

This contrasting view of traditional ‘rationalistic’ and ‘dramaturgical’ approaches to managing change are summarised in Table 2.

**Table 2    A Dramaturgical Approach to Managing Change**

***Rationalistic******Dramaturgical***

*Change Agency*Applying Acting

                                         Technique                   Mindfully

*Change Roles*Designing                 Mobilising

Roles                    Power

*Planning Change*Planning  Preparing

Projects                         Rituals

*Leading Change*Executing Handling

Tasks                        Interaction

*Learning & Change* Evaluating                 Guiding

Outcomes                   Reflection

The third major contribution of dramaturgy is the use of drama as a *metaphor* for understanding, exploring and effectively operating in such situations (Mangham, 1978; Cornellisen, 2004; Edgley, 2003). In complex and shifting ways, the dramaturgical approach views social and organisational life both *as* drama and *like* drama. Analytically, and in the work of particular writers, these views are and can be intertwined.

As outlined in classic terms in Burke’s ‘dramatism’, it is valid and useful to regard social life *as* drama, not as a metaphor but in ‘literal’ terms (Brock et.al, 1985, as a metonym Czarniwaska, 1997). In any human encounter, the participants individually and collectively define, negotiate and re-define the ‘definition of the situation’. Following, Thomas’s classic aphorism, "If men define things as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas, 1923), how they define the situation influences how they will act. The narratives offered, the plots elaborated and the characters identified as dramatic characterisations of the situation define what it is meaningful for people to do in any situation (Czarniawska, 1997). Burke (Overington, 1977) provides the classic elaboration of this insight, arguing that the ‘reasons’ people act, the ‘accounts’ they offer and the ‘motives’ that they attribute to themselves and others, are all based on how they ‘frame’ (Goffman, 1974) what is relevant, possible and appropriate in a given situation. Burke focuses, in particular, on the interpretation people give of the appropriate relation between 5 key elements of any situation (a ‘Pentad’) made up of the Act, (What was done); Scene (When and Where it was done); Agent (Who did it); Agency (How he did it); and Purpose (Why he did it). [[3]](#footnote-4) How individuals and groups are then rhetorically persuaded to define the kind of situation they are in (what Burke characterises as the perceived ‘ratios’ between elements of the Pentad), directly influences how they will act. In this way, situational action is linked “to its sense rather than behaviour to its determinants.” ( Geertz, 1983: 34), for at root “man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun’ (Geertz, 1983: 34).

The dramaturgical view of social life *as* drama goes one step further, however. A dramatic performance *in situ* is made up of more than the existence of a dramatic script (or scripts) for actors and audiences. It would be just as mistaken to ‘read off’ what will happen in a situation from narrative accounts of its character or interpretations of the situational Pentad as it would be to attribute action and behaviour to biological instincts, pre-given intentions or structural determinants. Outcomes are a result of the complex situational performance, intertwining the participants’ ‘self-interaction’ (in an ‘internal’ conversation) and ‘social-interaction’ (in an ‘external’ conversation) (Denzin, 1992). A dramatic encounter is, therefore, inherently upredictable and suspenseful as motives, intentions and causal explanations are as much outcomes as inputs into situated social interactions (Cziarnawska, 1997, p.15/16). Such conditions are not given but ‘enacted’ (Weick, 2001) , the product of meaningful negotiated social interaction embedded in a web of collective knowledge and relationships .[[4]](#footnote-5) (Antonacopoulou, 2008).

**5. Complementary Dramaturgical Approaches to Managing Change**

In contrast to the view of social and organisational life *as* drama, Erving Goffman and others have argued that the dramaturgical approach is best seen as making the claim that situational encounters are merely *like* drama, a simple metaphor for exploring the ensuing interactions.[[5]](#footnote-6) As Goffman (1961) emphasises, there are clearly identifiable differences between ‘real life’ and institutionalised ‘theatre’, including the fact that in the latter the contrived characters and plots do not have real consequences, actors are not at the same time the audience and so on. It is argued, therefore, that the metaphor is useful for drawing attention to some but not all key characteristics of social interaction.

As a general perspective on managing change, the theatrical view of social life as being ‘like’ drama provides a provocative rhetorical counterweight to more formalised rationalistic views of organisations and change. It draws on, and extends, a long standing romantic and cultural awareness that in a sense ‘All the world’s a stage’[[6]](#footnote-7) and provocatively extends this into an understanding of a late modern view of organisations as formally rational and economising systems of action (Weber, 1997; Bell, 1996; Bauman, 2000). In opposition to instrumental task-based views of organisations, it highlights the degree to which all successful task performance involves more or less effective ‘displays’ to relevant ‘audiences’ (Bolman and Deal, 1997). In contrast to views of organisations as the more or less automatic performance of institutionalised roles, it emphasises the presence of role distance, conflict and ambiguity, and the creative role of ‘actors’ as a juggler of multiple and shifting scripts and performances on diverse stages (Carlson, 1996; Mirvis, 2005; Mangham and Overington, 1987, p.164).

In this sense, the strong organisation-like-theatre approach provides a dramatic and provocative challenge to rationalistic views of organisations and change. Within rationalistic organisations, this potentially provokes a defensive reaction, dismissing such a view as an unrealistic, superficial and playful approach irrelevant to the real practical needs of business. On the other hand, it can also be seen as a liberating source of creativity and reflection, providing practical advice on how effective managers handle the impression management challenge of presenting a formal ‘frontstage’ public performance of rationality or ‘rhetoric of administration’, while simultaneously addressing the other intertwined dimension of organisational life and action - the informal ‘backstage’ of more distanced, critical and reflective commentaries, and the ‘rhetoric of realpolitik’ (Goffman, March and Olsen, 1983).

In addition to this general provocative and reflective role, however, the organisation-like-drama approach seeks to provide an additional set of illuminating and useful metaphorical images for understanding and guiding managing change. The organisation-as-drama approach views managing change as situated social interaction, occurring within interaction rituals as enacted narratives, and involving more or less purposive and reflective human agency. The ‘like’ drama view can be seen as supplementing rather than supplanting this perspective in its deployment of the *metaphor* of managing change as being like professional theatre (Czarniawska, 1997, p.15/16). As outlined in Table 3, the metaphorical view provides a set of creative resources for illuminating the key areas of managing change. The list illustrated in the table and further commented upon below should not be understood in restrictive terms as ‘the only’ metaphors for addressing areas of change management but , rather, as illustrations of the type of metaphor that has been and can be usefully deployed within the field of organisational studies.

**Table 3 Dramaturgical Approaches to Managing Change**

**Metonym (As Drama) Metaphor (Like Drama)**

*Change Agency*Acting                         Improvising

                                         Mindfully                         Theatre

*Change Roles*Mobilising                       Producing

Power Dramas

*Planning Change*Preparing                       Writing

Rituals                   Scripts

*Leading Change* HandlingStaging

Interaction                   Presentations

*Learning & Change* Guiding                         Rehearsing

Reflection                      & Reviewing

In planning change, the ‘as’ drama view focuses on change as a ritual performance, the success of which depends to a significant degree on how well it is prepared as a ‘transition ritual’. The ‘like’ drama view may use a variety of professional theatre metaphors as a useful heuristic to aid understanding and action in this area. It may, for example, view the planning of change or the preparation of rituals as the writing of scripts, exploring the role of the writer in a dramatic production, how writing draws on established narratives and literary/dramatic devices, how scripts are written as instructions to actors, how such scripts are interpreted and refined as the writer interacts with actors, directors, producers and so on. Similarly, the handling of situated interaction in leading change may be viewed as like a staged presentation, involving dramatic costumes, props and techniques, backstage and frontstage activities, establishing credibility in the performance, and managing overall interactions between actors and audience ‘on the night’. Ongoing learning about managing change initiatives can be viewed as guided reflection through theatre-like activities pre-performance (‘rehearsal’), during performance (‘response’) and post-performance (‘reviews’) (Mangham, 1978; 1990; Mangham and Overington, 1987).

Acting mindfully and mobilising power in undertaking these activities can, in turn, be viewed through such professional theatre metaphors as ‘improvisational theatre’ (Kanter, 2002; Vera and Crossan, 2004) and ‘dramatic production’. Like improvisational theatre, actors are required to creatively respond to, interpret and develop upon general themes, think on their feet, involve audiences, have a tolerance for suspense, and involve quick reactions to responses to successive ‘experimental’ enactments (Kanter, 2002). Improvisational theatre’s embodiment of a practice that cares passionately about the recognition of multiple perspectives (in a ‘yes-anding’ mode), the importance of active listening, and the ability to embrace different interpretations of ongoing situations has also been observed as key factors in leadership development (Antonacopoulou and Bento, 2003).

.As with dramatic productions, the successful establishment and finalisation of staged performances is also the result of complex and effective interactions between producers, directors, actors and scriptwriters in the context of funding providers, theatrical agents, distribution channels, and the press (Mangham, 1978).

**6. Conclusion**

The purpose of this chapter has been to introduce a dramaturgical approach to managing change. This is provided as one example of how to enhance interest in and understanding of its phronetic nature, and encourage and support professional reflection on ‘wisdom in the doing’. In addressing this task, each section of the chapter was intended to be suggestive and introductory rather than definitive in nature. The managing change literature was overviewed as a potential source of phronetic ‘heuristics’. Managing change-in-practice was presented as a key set of assumptions underlying processual and situational understandings of the challenge of a phronetic approach to changing. The dramaturgical perspective on managing change, including both change-*as*-drama and change-*like*-drama variants, was introduced as a valuable culturally resonant, intellectually coherent, and phronetically focused approach to enhancing understanding and reflection. The chapter will have succeeded in its task if these suggestive outlines are taken as a useful stimulant, a set of prompts and cues for further research and pedagogic development on the phronetic nature of managing and organizing changing processes.

*“When I say artist I don’t mean in the narrow sense of the word—but the man who is building things—creating molding the earth—whether it be the plains of the west—or the iron ore of Penn. It’s all a big game of construction—some with a brush—some with a shovel—some choose a pen.”*

Jackson Pollock

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1. c.f. “Lewin’s model was a simple one, with organizational change involving three stages; unfreezing, changing, and refreezing…This quaintly linear and static conception – the organization as ice cube – is so wildly inappropriate that it is difficult to see why it has not only survived but prospered, except for one thing. It offers managers a very straightforward way of planning their actions, by simplifying an extraordinarily complex process into a child’s formula.” (Kanter, Stein and Jick, p.10). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. Established overviews of the dramaturgical approach (Edgley, 2003; Harre and Secord, 1973, Hare and Blumberg, 1988), and its implications for organisational studies (Carlson, 1996; Hopfl, 2006; Mangham and Overington, 1987, Bolman and Deal, 1997), document its established philosophical and sociological heritage, with key figures such as Edmund Burke, Erving Goffman, Rom Harre, Ralph Turner, and Richard Schechner building on the earlier pragmatic and interactionist work of Cooley, James, Dewey and Mead and linked to the symbolic interactionist work of authors such as Blumer and Strauss. More contemporary work on post-structural philosophical and cultural studies, performativity, narrative views of self, identity and organisations and positioning theory continue this tradition (Denzin, 1992). As established overviews of this perspective emphasise (Harre and Secord, 1973, Edgley, 2003; Mangham And Overington, 1987) the dramaturgical approach embodies a recognition of *homo performans* (Turner, 1985, p.187) as an expressive and reflective being. This goes beyond the ability to conduct performances, understand the characters that we adopt and the parts that we play, and the monitoring of these performances. It includes and expands a ‘meta-theatre’ consciousness (Mangham, 1978: 28),. It is built on an awareness of and support for the ability of human beings to reflectively monitor the monitoring of their performances (Harre and Secord, 1973). It recognises the nature and significance of the creative ‘liminal’ gaps that are opened up in the often taken-for-granted routines of social life in which individuals anxiously yet creatively stand back and reflect on their habitual conduct. (Turner, 1982; Turner, 1985) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. The origins of this analysis of situated action can be traced back to Aristotle’s ‘four causes’ and mediaeval rhetoricians ‘hexameter’ for characterising events. It is popularly presented in the journalist’s catechism of summarising the Who, What, When, Where, Why and How of any story in the first paragraph of an article. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. In a sense, this view of social life as drama stems from the traditional meaning of the Greek word drama meaning "action" (Classical Greek: δρᾶμα, drama), which is derived from "to do" (Classical Greek: δράω, drao). This has been continued in our use of the same terms ‘acting’ and ‘acting’, ‘performance’ and ‘performance’, to refer to both pro-active purposeful behaviour and fictional pretence, effective behaviour with real outcomes and a staged illusion. At root, both routine ‘real’ social life and specialised ‘fictional’ art and theatre share the same origins in *artifice*, the intertwining of intellect and emotion in the construction of meaning and purpose, the attribution of identifiable plots and continued suspense in the face of inherent unpredictability. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
5. There is ongoing debate surrounding whether the view of social life as drama is itself metaphor, and hence this absolute division breaks down. See (Brock, B, Burke, K, Burgess, P and Simons, H., 1985; Cornelissen, 2004). Whatever interpretation one accepts, however, a carefully worded distinction between ‘as’ and ‘like’ is feasible, if these are (a) seen as complementary and intertwined, and (b) latter is seen as using the particular metaphor of professional stage theatre, particularly of the kind prominent in the West, to extend our understanding and exploration of social life *as* drama. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
6. The first indications were In Praise of Folly, and then …., and then Shakespeare Act 2 Scene 7 of *As You Like It* within Western culture. Much of the traditional ‘like theatre’ dramaturgical imagery have come from this tradition (Harre). Although, the limitations of Aristotelean theatre as a restrictive metaphor, has been challenged by advocates of more radical theatre (Brecht, Boal) and broader non-Western ideas of narrative and theatre that go beyond the circumscribed plots and clear characters embodied in the Western genre (Gabriel, personal communication). [↑](#footnote-ref-7)