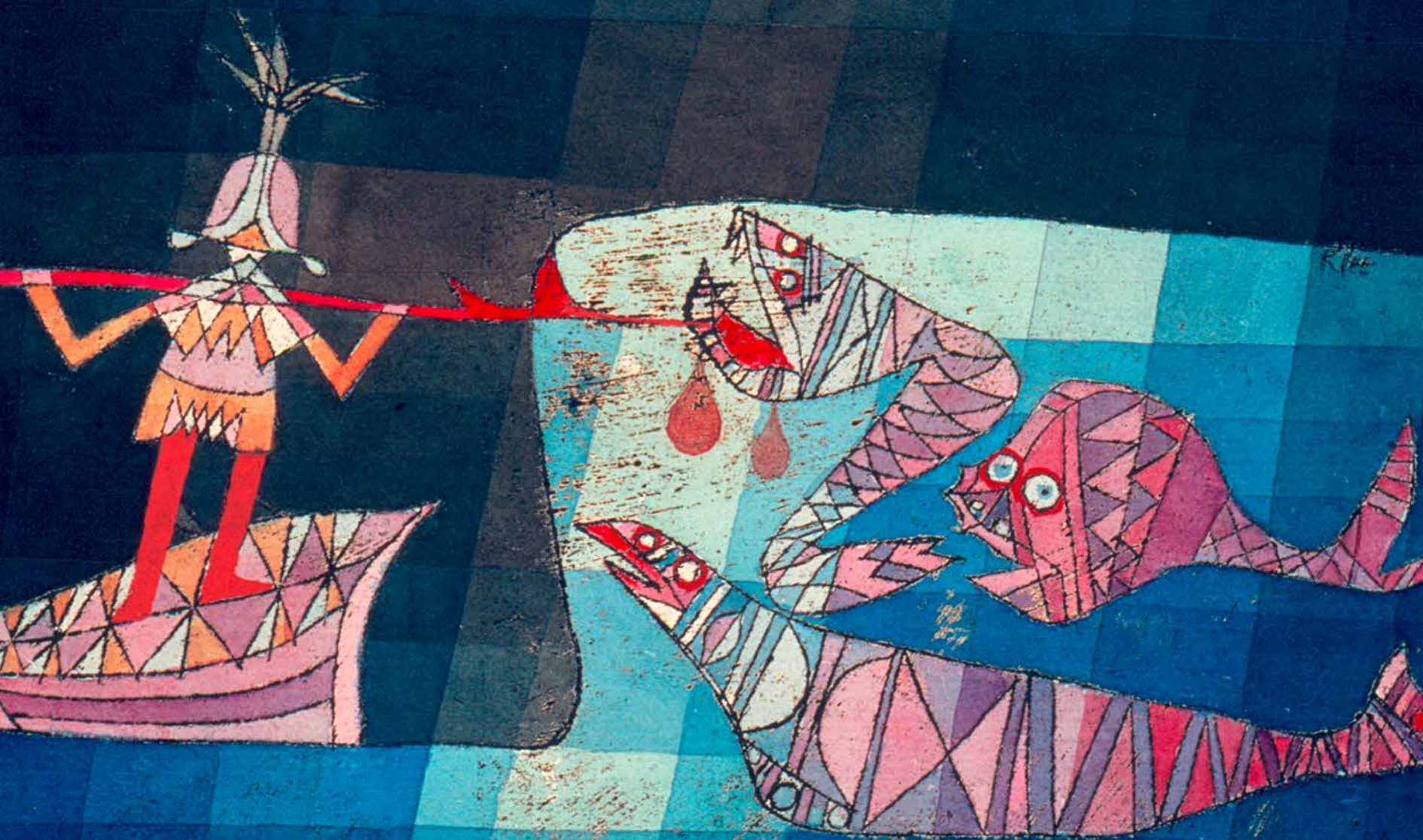


Diagnosing Change



The organizational undercurrent

Rob van Es

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Introduction

A good introduction appeals directly to a specific target audience. Which is easier said than done in this case – after all, an interdisciplinary diagnosis of the organizational process has a wide and varied audience. Add to this the fact that the book is a passionate plea to observe organizations from multiple perspectives, and the problem is compounded even further. If the introduction does not immediately display the author's ability to employ multiple perspectives, the credibility of this book will be undermined. Therefore, what you have before you is not one, but four separate introductions to this book. Each is aimed at a different kind of reader.

Target Audience 1 – **The Interested Layperson**

My first target is the interested layperson who wants to read an enlightening book that broaches diagnostic topics in a broad and visually stimulating manner.

This book takes an unorthodox approach to organizational change. The case studies are derived from the arts rather than government institutions or businesses. The book uses 26 paintings and lithographs, 19 films and 11 poems to guide the reader through the process of making a diagnosis with a view to change, or, in other words, the process of *Diagnosing Change*.

Ultimately, all the insights gained converge in a model based on filmmaking. This is why you will come across terms like ‘zooming in’ and ‘zooming out’, as well as ‘close-up’ and ‘screenplay’. This interdisciplinary approach to the specialized subject of change diagnostics results in an unusual and very visually oriented book.

Target Audience 2 – Starting Colleagues

My second audience consists of fellow consultants who are relatively new to the science of change. These readers want an informative, accessible book. They require a unique and attractive introduction.

It is a well-known and worrying fact in the world of organization science that 75% of change processes fail to achieve their goals. One important reason for this is that diagnoses are often made too quickly or superficially. The time initially gained is ultimately lost. A quick diagnosis often turns out to be just off target, to lead people astray, or to fuel extra resistance. It pays off to make a careful diagnosis based on a systematic analysis of all actors and factors that influence an organization. That is what this book has to offer.

Target Audience 3 – Senior Change Agents

Senior change agents are my third target audience. They want a snappy introduction that acknowledges them as fellow experts.

Obviously, a good diagnosis is vital to any process of change. Commissions seldom result from cold leads. Most come from a warm market lead, from a known organization and sector: a context where even the commissioner and his or her colleagues might be familiar faces. Experience can be a goldmine to the

senior change agent, but it can also be baggage. It can be another word for ‘past mistakes’.

This book presents a carefully constructed diagnostic model based on over 500 diagnostic processes in which I have been involved. But who is to say that makes me the expert? After all, the biggest mistake you can make as a veteran diagnostician is to think you can make no more mistakes.

Target Audience 4 – Researchers and Research Managers

The fourth and final group of readers for whom I have written this book are researchers and research managers. To satisfy this audience, the very least the introduction must do is to clearly state which research questions are dealt with, and why.

Change agents in organizations need clearly written theoretical literature about change-oriented organizational diagnostics. Not much has been published on this topic. What little there is tends to focus on the rational, management-centered, top-down approach. Literature on bottom-up change is scarce and unimaginative. Therefore, the main research question of my study is: ‘What is an adequate and appealing model to diagnose organizational processes, if the aim is to change those processes from the bottom up?’

This main question can be divided into three sub-questions:

1. What elements should a change-oriented diagnosis consist of?
2. Which questions should be asked regarding each of these elements?
3. How can such a model be substantiated with the help of visual means?

Ultimately, all readers are interested in the answers to these basic questions. For easy reference, the answers are presented

in a separate box, set off from the main text. They form a brief guideline for reading this book.

Guideline for Reading this Book

The model to diagnose change is presented on pages 178-179, after a full explanation of the model in Chapter 7.

The model consists of seven elements in total. The first four are camera movements:

1. Zooming out to see the organization as a whole
2. Zooming in on the change process
3. Close-up of the commission(er)
4. Extreme close-up of the change agent

The last three elements are aspects of the screenplay:

5. Characters
6. Genre and plot
7. Coherent metaphors

For each element, there are several questions. These are summarized at the end of each chapter.

The model is substantiated by:

- synthesizing and adapting several relevant practical theories;
- viewing and interpreting various art forms.

Structure

The book is made up of four parts. Part I discusses how people perceive and give meaning to the world and how they learn. Part II deals with assigning meaning and interpreting perceptions in the context of organizations. In Part III, we view and analyze various artworks as a tool for approaching case studies in an unusual and visual manner. And in Part IV, all insights gained in the previous three sections are synthesized into an overarching diagnostic model for change. More detail on each of the four parts follows below.

Part I – Perceiving, Giving Meaning and Learning

This part discusses the ways in which people perceive and make sense of the world, and how they learn. Chapter 1, ‘Perception’, focuses on the senses and awareness of sensory perception. What senses do we possess? What information do they provide and what type of interference can they cause? Within the information we perceive, we tend to look for patterns such as Gestalt wholes. We are also able to switch between patterns. Chapter 2, ‘Giving meaning and learning’, deals with the contextualization of information in a network of existing knowledge. In a more general cultural context we call this ‘assigning meaning’; in a specific, personal context this is called ‘giving meaning’. When this process of assigning or giving meaning is changed, learning takes place.

Part II – Giving Meaning and Learning in Organizations

Part II places the act of ‘giving meaning’ in the context of organizations. Chapter 3 starts by defining the difference between reorganizing (top-down change) and subjectivating (bottom-up

change). In order to understand subjectivation, we need to take a brief look at the philosophy of change and the psychology of emotion. The organizational process consists of a surface current and an undercurrent. Subjectivation is possible only if the emotions in the undercurrent are recognized. Chapter 4, 'Diagnoscate', reviews various common diagnostic methods and models, focusing primarily on the metaphorical approach. Eleven metaphors are identified, four of which are found in the surface current, another four in the undercurrent and the remaining three metaphors spanning one or more currents. This results in a metaphorical model for organizational diagnosis. I extrapolate from this a practical model, based on discourse analysis, for setting up and analyzing interviews and written documents.

Part III – The Visual Arts as Case Studies

Part III of this book contains case studies from the world of the visual arts. Chapter 5, 'Velázquez's Las Meninas as an Organization', discusses one of the artist's most influential works. The canvas is a Spanish court scene from the seventeenth century. But is Las Meninas a simple representation of reality? The painting is special because it includes an image of the artist himself. As Paul Klee put it: 'Art does not reproduce what we see; rather, it makes us see.' If you observe and interpret with care, then you will see what is actually going on in this painting, who this painter is and where the viewer is. Chapter 6, 'Picasso's Variations on a Case' analyzes how Picasso painted a series of variations on Velázquez's theme. In every one, Picasso changed the relative importance of the actors and factors in the painting. He did not paint the characters as he saw them, but as he imagined them, with surprising results. His variations demonstrate the importance of multiperspectivism when making a diagnosis.

Part IV – Model for Change-oriented Diagnosis

The fourth and final part of this book synthesizes the understanding gained in the previous chapters into a model for change-oriented diagnosis. In Chapter 7, 'Diagnosing Change as Film', the insights gained earlier are systematically consolidated into one model using the terminology of cinematography. The core idea is that diagnosing with an eye to change is like making a film in reverse order. First we see the finished product and then we deduce from that the screenplay it was evidently based on.

The chapter ends with a schematic presentation of the diagnostic model, which can be used as a guide for actual diagnoses.

Rounding off

The section entitled 'Rounding Off' contains 'An Interviewing method'. This is an approach to interviews, based on discourse analysis and derived from the metaphorical model for organizational diagnosis (Ch. 4). It offers a systematic approach to setting up and analyzing diagnostic interviews and documents.

My 'Film Essay' uses the film *Being There* to demonstrate the benefit of emptying the mind in order to heighten receptiveness.

The book concludes with a list of references and an index of names, titles and characters.

Amstelveen, November 2010

Rob van Es

This division into two types of intelligence is not absolute. Cross-overs are possible; there are chains that link the reflective and the adaptive. In fact, someone's personal characteristics may be largely determined by the way her adaptive and reflective powers are connected.

Instinct, Intuition and Inspiration

Obviously, organizations employ all sorts of people with different personalities. Some people are focused on pleasing

other people and seeking approval (dependent). Others crave attention and tend to get highly emotional (theatrical). Perfectionists try to do everything to the best of their ability without caring for their own emotional state. Obsessives want to do everything themselves and rigidly stick to the rules. Yet another type are constantly watching themselves in

fear of becoming dependent (narcissists). Anti-social types are indifferent towards others and are only out to protect their own interests. This list of six personality types is not exhaustive (see Van de Does 2004), but it is definitely recognizable to professionals. At the end of the day, this can result in impressive and painful drama, see Box 2.4.



Box 2.4 An Obsessive in Retrospect

In *The Remains of the Day* (1989) Kazuo Ishiguro describes how his protagonist, Mr Stevens, embarks on a journey in 1956 through the West Country to visit Miss Kenton. Miss Kenton is the former housekeeper of Darlington Hall, where both she and Stevens, a butler, worked in the 1930s. His official reason for visiting her is to call on her expertise. However, it turns out to be more of a trip down memory lane which calls up hidden emotions. Excessive professionalism had clouded Stevens' view of the true nature of his former employer, a Nazi. And worse, his obsession with decorum had prevented him from responding to Miss Kenton's overtures at the time; she eventually left and married another. At the end of his career, Stevens can only conclude that his life has not been a success; his final meeting with Miss Kenton leaves him feeling impotent and filled with a sense of lost opportunity. They look back on what could have been a wonderful future. Ishiguro evokes this using minimal dialogue. In 1993, the story was made into a motion picture by James Ivory, with Anthony Hopkins and Emma Thompson in excellent leading roles.

Illustration 7 Mr. Stevens (Anthony Hopkins) and Miss Kenton (Emma Thompson) in *The Remains of the Day*, 1993, still frame provided by EYE Film Institute Netherlands



Box 2.7 Fixed Retention Patterns in Action

In Hal Ashby's 1979 film *Being There* (after Jerzy Kosinski's novella), Peter Sellers shows impressive restraint in his role as Chance, a gardener. Chance is a harmless man: tranquil and well-bred, though strange. His frame of reference is his garden and the shows he watches on television. Chance watches others closely and states his observations matter-of-factly. He also pauses frequently because he is quite slow, and he is often at a loss for words. The people in his surroundings grow restless with the amount of space he gives them; they fill the space by giving free reign to their retention patterns. Most of them draw the conclusion that Chance is a wise, experienced and interesting person. Chance's adaptive emptiness gets him far: he rises to the post of government advisor and becomes a political commentator on TV. You are what you think, about yourself and others. 'Life is a state of mind.' (see also *The Receptiveness of an Empty Mind: A Film Essay*, p. 206).

Illustration 9 Chance (Peter Sellers) in Being There, 1979, still frame provided by EYE Film Institute Netherlands

'At that point, I have to switch to my reflective intelligence. I have to figure out how this mismatch relates to the assumptions and causal maps underlying my reservoir of beliefs. Where does it go wrong, where is the rub? Adjustments to my assumptions (reframing) also rearrange my reservoir of beliefs. This allows me to place the exception I just experienced anyway and to slip back to my adaptive intelligence.' Figure 2.5 should be read from top to bottom.

Figure 2.5 Weick's Process of Sensemaking

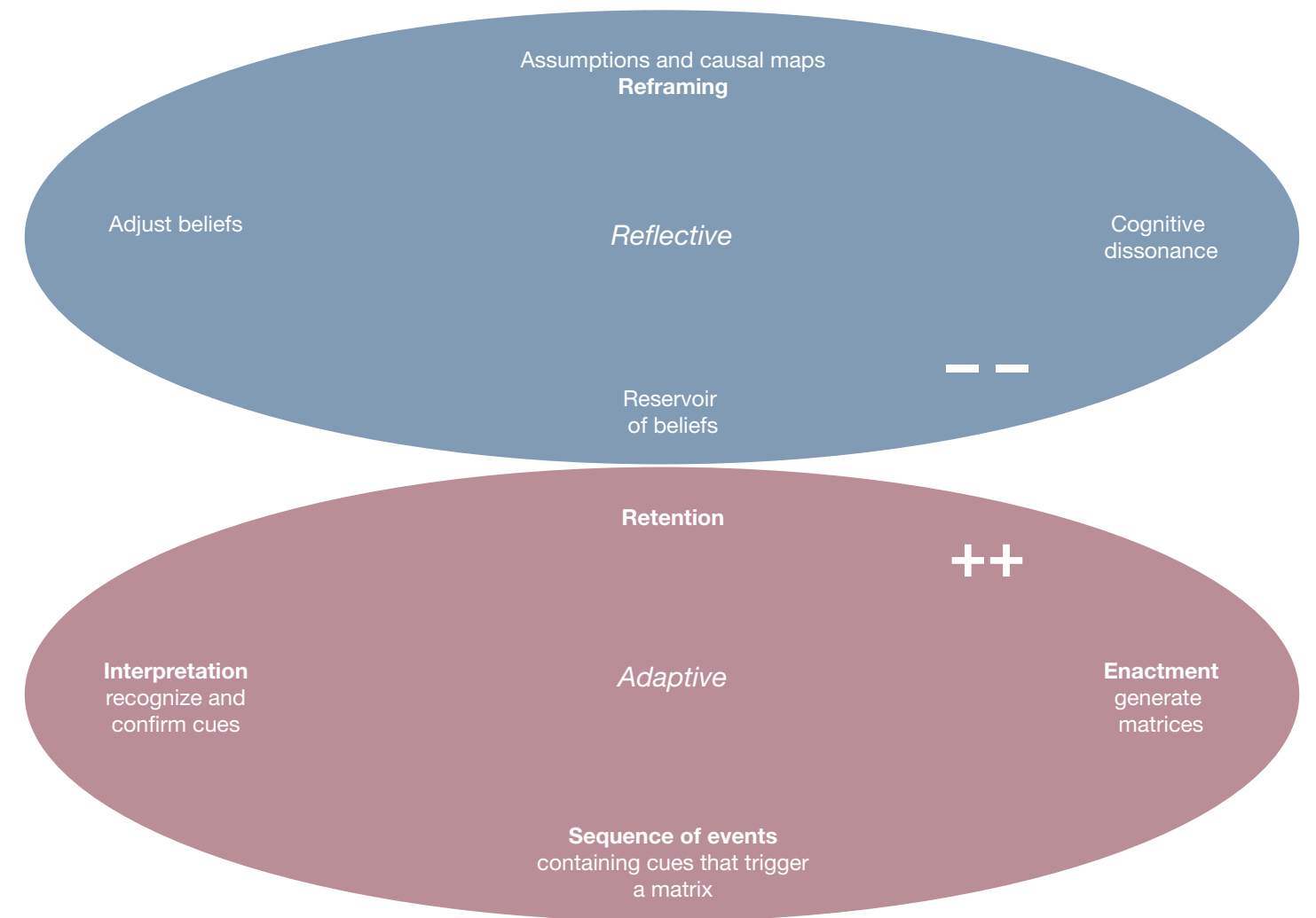




Illustration 27 Billy Elliot (Jamie Bell) in Stephen Daldry's Billy Elliot, 2003. Still frame provided by EYE Film Institute Netherlands

to. But he has the misfortune of growing up in a blue collar environment where men are expected to train boxing or play football and dancing is thought to be for sissies. Even as a boy, Billy has to strug-

gle against the limitations and prejudices of his own milieu. His passion and self-awareness finally see him through and he embarks on a dancing career. Sometimes, you can only grow and develop when you

have the courage to leave your childhood or your milieu behind, or to leave the department or even the organization you initially felt at home in.

JUDITH HERZBERG

ZOALS

Zoals je soms een kamer ingaat, niet weet waarvoor,
en dan terug moet langs het spoor van je bedoeling,
zoals je zonder tasten snel iets uit de kast pakt
en pas als je het hebt, weet wat het was,
zoals je soms een pakje ergens heen brengt
en, bij het weggaan, steeds weer denkt, schrikt,
dat je te licht bent, zoals je je, wachtend,
minutenlang hevig verliefd in elk nieuw mens
maar toch het meeste wachtend bent,
zoals je weet: ik ken het hier, maar niet waar het om ging
en je een geur te binnen schiet bij wijze van
herinnering, zoals je weet bij wie je op alert
en bij wie niet, bij wie je kan gaan liggen,
zo, denk ik, denken dieren, kennen dieren de weg.

'Zoals' from Zoals by Judith Herzberg, 1992 [Amsterdam: De Harmonie]

In *Zoals* [*The Way*] (1987), Dutch poet Judith Herzberg shows us how we can open ourselves to other types of thinking and acting, to intuition and association, to adaptive intelligence.

Open-mindedness is also one of Chance's key character traits in *Being There* (1979), as we saw in Chapter 2. Chance has a limited frame of reference: gardening and watching television. His survival method is imitation and repetition. He has no bag-

THE WAY

The way you sometimes enter a room, don't know why
and then have to retrace the steps of your intention,
or unerringly grab something from the cupboard
and only know what it is once you have it in your hands,
the way you sometimes bring a package somewhere
and when you leave, keep thinking, startled
that you're lighter, the way you, while waiting,
fall deeply in love, for several minutes, with every new person
but are still mainly waiting,
the way you sense: I know this place, but can't quite place it
and a scent springs to mind like a
memory, the way you know with whom to be on guard,
or not, with whom you can lie down,
this, I think, is how animals think, how animals know the way.

gage in terms of personality or ambition so he leaves others plenty of room to attribute their own thoughts to him. In Illustration 28 we even see him walking on water in the film's final shot. He seems surprised, but also unsurprised. After all,

Although these models cover a large part of the area we need to investigate in order to diagnose change, they leave some terrain uncharted. As Leon de Caluwé and Hans Vermaak (2006) point out, change is complicated by all sorts of organizational mechanisms that are ‘full of irrationality’. Their examples of irrationality include ‘back burner decision-making’, the tension between autonomy and hierarchy, saying and doing opposite things, the tension between stability and innovation, cultural diversity and emotions. In short, all those issues that can only be fully understood from within the organizational undercurrent. Manfred Kets de Vries (1999) has very different motives for also pointing to the importance of the undercurrent. His research and experience as a consultant have led him to postulate 12 values very often present in successful organizations. His list of 12 is fairly random, but it can easily be ordered into two groups of six. The first six values

Box 4.3 Rashomon

Akira Kurosawa’s film *Rashômon* (1950) poses the question: What exactly happened in the forest? A dead samurai was found there, that much is clear. Kurosawa’s investigation includes a clairvoyant’s version of the story: not rational, but highly informative. All in all, the film offers seven accounts from six perspectives, which remain contradictory at crucial points. We are left with blank spaces in our knowledge. We will never know ‘the truth’. What remains is for us to decide what consequences this has for ourselves: Which responsibilities are we still prepared to bear? Or to put it differently: Who do we want to be, in our own eyes and in those of others? See Van Es (1996; 2002).

are typical of the surface current, the second six are related to the undercurrent (see Figure 4.5).

The second set of six are the less tangible, less rational aspects of the organiza-

tion process that are underemphasized in most common diagnostic models. Yet they may be of great importance, especially if ‘the truth’ is somewhat unclear and we are forced to rely on commitment and responsibility (see Box 4.3).

Figure 4.5 Values Characteristic of Successful Organizations

Surface current	Customer/market-oriented Result-oriented Quick response	Empowerment Continuous learning Responsibility
Undercurrent	Team-oriented Respect for others Constructive feedback	Sincerity Fair play Trust



Illustration 35 Tajōmaru (Toshiro Mifune) in Akira Kurosawa’s *Rashomon*, 1950. Still frame provided by Still-Photo



The Mirror

Anyone portraying an organization, whether in words or on a canvas, uses special techniques. It is important to identify these and lay bare their relationship to the person employing them, in this case Velázquez.

The use of the mirror in *Las Meninas* is a striking feature. It was a flat mirror, affordable only to the super rich at that time. Velázquez stages the mirror as if it is one of the paintings on the wall. In order to make clear that this is a mirror, he uses a white line just inside the frame and a bluish hue (Miller 1998). The incidence of light on the mirrored figures is pointedly different from the other rectangles on the wall. Use of the mirror enlarges the room depicted at the front of the painting. Though no painter had ever done this before in precisely this way, it is not entirely original either. The first time a mirror was very prominently included in a painted interior is in Jan van Eyck's *The Arnolfini Portrait*. This painting shows a bride and groom facing us, while behind them, on the rear wall of their sumptuous mer-

chant's room, we see a convex mirror. Its reflection shows the presence of two more people in the room: witnesses to the marriage oath the couple is taking. One of the witnesses is the portrait's painter. The Gothic script on the wall over the mirror reads: *Johannes de Eyck fuit hic. 1434*, see Illustration 43.

In this way, the painter not only affirms the importance of marriage, but also his own. In addition, the mirror opens up the painted room to the viewer. This enlarged perspective involves the viewer more closely in the painting. It pulls the viewer in.

There can be no doubt that Velázquez was familiar with Van Eyck's work. As an art dealer selling paintings of the Flemish School, Rubens twice visited Philip IV. On the second occasion, he became well acquainted with Velázquez. But more importantly, the Spanish court acquired *The Arnolfini Portrait* just before Velázquez became the court painter. He must have had every opportunity to study the canvas and draw inspiration from it. Van Eyck's subtle approach becomes even



Illustration 44 Jan van Eyck, *The Arnolfini Portrait*, close-up of the convex mirror, 1434. Note the inverse perspective

clearer if we zoom in on the convex mirror and switch perspectives, see Illustration 44.

What we see is not a mirror image of the scene, but the scene from the mirror's perspective, and in it we now view the wedding couple as well as the two witnesses.

Variation of 19 September

On this vertical canvas, the formal leader is again out of the picture. But the composition brings out the fact that the space originally occupied by the painter is now empty. There may be a canvas, but certainly no Velázquez. We do see that the chamberlain in the doorway has definitively morphed into a painter: Picasso. The dark colors do not necessarily mean the mood is somber. In fact, Picasso is working here in the strictly Cubist style of his famous 1921 painting *Three Musicians*. He is drawing on an earlier, successful type of representation.

Draw on Your Own Experience

This variation continues in the same vein as the preliminary diagnosis, but radicalizes it. Sideline the commissioner and follow your own diagnostic style. Use the work that brought you success in the past, because that is what you can rely on.



Illustration 53 Pablo Picasso, *Las Meninas* – 19 September, 1957. Picasso Museum, Barcelona. © Pictoright 2010

Use Your Own Judgment

This variation can be seen as a depiction of what can happen if the formal leader and the commissioner are totally on the same page. This can have a claustrophobic effect on the diagnostician, certainly if intuition tells him or her that the commissioner and leader are wrong about the organization's problems. But even if the pressure is great and the room to maneuver is limited, it is essential to remain true to your professional judgment when making a diagnosis.

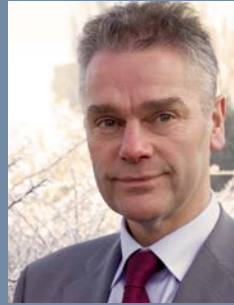
Illustration 54 Pablo Picasso, *Las Meninas* – 2 October, 1957. Picasso Museum, Barcelona. © Pictoright 2010



Variation of 2 October

Velázquez, the king and the queen are back and look very much alike in this Cubist variation. The old master is much smaller than his canvas, however, and the canvas is more colossal than ever. In a sense, this is a return to the group picture we saw in the 17 August version, but the mood is entirely different. The bright, primary colors evoke a nearly claustrophobic universe. What room is left for Picasso here? He is still there, but small and far away, at the top of the stairs. And he continues to paint.

'Diagnosing change is first and foremost a matter of painstaking observation: watching and listening closely. This book is an effective aid in that process. It offers a systematic method of making diagnoses in order to bring about organizational change.'



This book is an introduction into organizational diagnostics with an emphasis on the most difficult type of change process: bottom-up change. What sets this book apart is that it presents its subject matter in a visually attractive and unique way, by using artwork as a primary medium. By analyzing 26 paintings and lithographs, 19 films and 11 poems, this publication introduces the reader to the practice of diagnosing change. The result is a clear diagnostic tool grounded in cinematic technique which uses terminology such as: zooming in, zooming out, close-up and elements of the screenplay. The diagnostic model has been proven effective for actual use. It was developed with input from more than 500 diagnostic processes the author was involved in.

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