

BOOK REVIEW¹

C. Heckscher, M. Maccoby, R. Ramirez, & P.E. Tixier
Agents of Change: Crossing the Post-Industrial Divide
New York: Oxford University Press

Reviewed by Rosane Giovis

One can find several books and many articles on managing change in organizations, but will find *Agents of Change* a provocative book that should be on the shelves of practitioners looking to broaden their understanding of the process of management and change.

The book's fundamental premise is to highlight the complexity of today's global business environment, which presents increased challenges to agents of change who need to involve entire stakeholder systems to battle the accelerating forces of deregulation, internationalization and restructuring. This core premise provides a new conceptual framework to the reader suggesting that organizations will need to rely on relationships beyond its walls since never before have competitors, partners, suppliers and buyers been so indistinguishable. The inter-dependant relationships amongst these stakeholders need to be managed appropriately to improve the set of relations that can encourage an organization to co-create the necessary changes with its environment. The book encourages an Open Systems Theory (Emery, 1999) view of organizations but does not endorse it. This omission is peculiar for a set of researcher/consultants who regard themselves as social scientists.

The book recognizes the movement from industrial to post industrial systems by highlighting our modern society's trend to knowledge work. The transition to a white collar professional and service economy is changing the landscape in which we work as the 'knowledge worker' challenges the status quo of old bureaucratic management. The authors contend that this requires collaboration and dialogues amongst all key stakeholders and provide strong detailed accounts of major organizational transformations to demonstrate the necessity of the stakeholder regime. Therefore, the authors see their roles as helping organizations ease into the transition from the industrial to the post-industrial system.

The book further focuses on the complexity of bureaucratic-Taylorist management by highlighting how bureaucracy hinders the dialogue that is necessary to build the stakeholder relations to achieve stability in our society. It is stimulating to read a 'change book' that seeks to understand how to transform societies. The reader will enjoy reading Chapter eleven, as the authors argue their premise critically as they question the need for stakeholders.

¹ Howard Doughty reviewed this book in *The Innovation Journal* Vol. 8 (4). However, the editors thought that the reader would be interested in the different perspective of a scholar who teaches public administration and a practitioner who is an internal consultant in a private sector organization. Since this issue presents different perspectives on empowerment, we thought this book also worth a different look.

In addition each of the four authors present four different case studies to which they argue that incremental change is no longer a viable solution to the malleable economic boundary but instead suggest that a 'new reconfiguration is required'. They break the reader's polarity thinking by suggesting that change is no longer neither a top bottom strategy nor a bottom up one.

Instead, they argue that sustainable change is systemic. All parts of the system are required to be involved. This premise moves away from the conventional remedy that is consistent with traditional consulting approaches and instead suggests the possibility for a more collaborative and democratic form of work.

Consultants will find chapters 7-9 helpful as the authors provide perspectives on intervention methodologies, tools, and techniques for the practitioner with a view of the consultant's unique challenges in a political system. The practitioner will appreciate their views on the dynamics at play within the client system.

The reader will enjoy the rich and international history that outlines some of the important movements from the 80's. Specifically it will provide insight into the historical accounts of the labour management co-operation and the Quality Work Life (QWL) movement through the case study reviews. Specifically the case studies address large public quasi-monopolies that primarily focus to improve union-management or worker-management relations. Each organisation in these cases faced enormous strategic challenges in which they had to fundamentally redefine themselves as they moved from quasi-monopoly to more competitive environments.

In addition the readers will find the authors' diverse backgrounds and expertise add to the strength and credibility of this book. Each author has been in the industry for over 30 years with research focusing on organizational change and different empowerment schemes. Their collaborative work efforts in this book create a big picture and long-term perspective on change management, which begins to redefine traditional empowerment schemes.

This book is highly recommended to a broad readership of academics, students and consultants who wish to further develop their understanding of the nature of change within organizations and societies. It is a welcoming addition to the change management literature.

References:

Emery, M. (1999). *Searching: The theory and practice of making cultural change*. Philadelphia: John Benjamins.

About the Author

Rosane Giovis is an internal consultant actively engaged in organizational innovation. She has an M.A. in Human Systems Intervention from Concordia University.