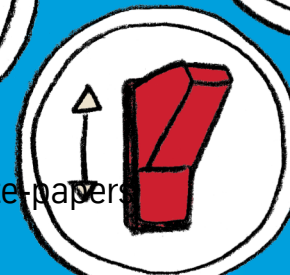
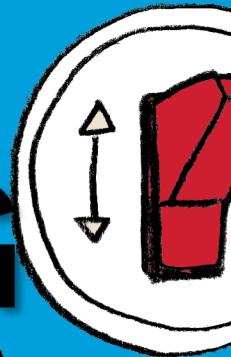
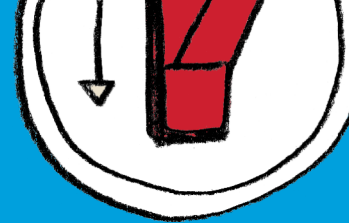
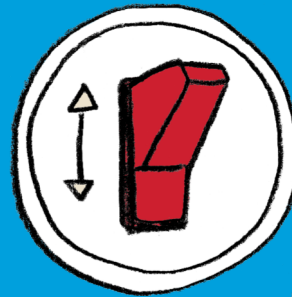




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FROM NOW TO NEW, RIGHT HERE: CHANGE-AS-FLIPPING

BetaCodex Network Associates

Niels Pflaeging & Silke Hermann

BetaCodex Network White Paper No. 16 | March 2019 | betacodex.org/white-papers

16

Change-as-Flipping:

The alternative to Change Management, the alternative to planned or imposed change

Change agents around the world have been imagining change *as projects, programs, planned exercises*. They have come to think of change-related work as stuff to be *kicked off, implemented and executed*. We have interpreted change as **difficult ventures, as endlessly long hikes, and as exhaustive trips**. No more: Here are five key insights into the true nature of change, and into how to create profound, transformational change, effortlessly and fast. Sounds impossible? Then check out these concepts for a more constructive and robust alternative to change management, or planned change, as you know it.

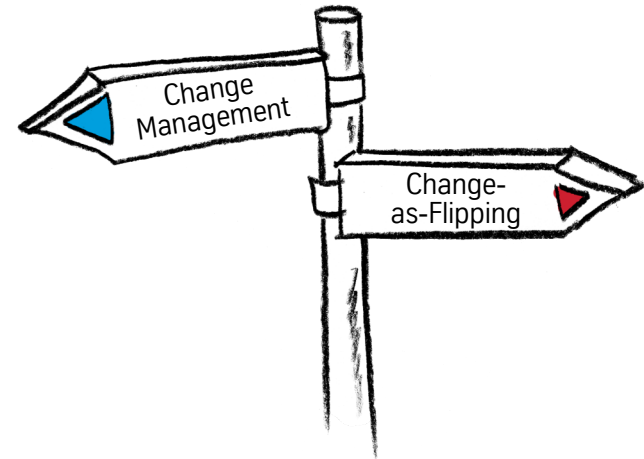
Insight 1. Change is not a *journey* - instead, it is *constant flipping*

Insight 2. There is no such thing as *Resistance to Change* - only smart responses to dumb *methods*

Insight 3. The problem is in the *system* - almost always

Insight 4. Org change is *socially dense* – *technique* is (almost) trivial

Insight 5. There is no such thing as *transformation* - instead, *everything 's an intervention*



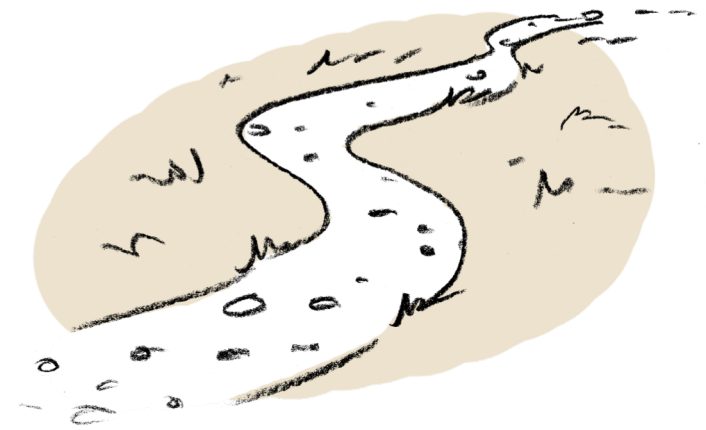
Most of us are used to approach organizational development with project management, or change management methods. But there is an alternative.

Insight 1.

Change is not a *journey* - instead, it is *constant flipping*

The most widely used metaphors of change liken change in organizations to a journey from the current state (often labeled *status quo*) to the desired state (a.k.a. *vision*). The desired state, in these metaphors, is seen as a place *out there in the future*. Or as a north star—never quite to be reached. We tend to believe that *change-as-a-journey* has to be long and arduous. That it is hard and dangerous. Consequently, armed with delusional *maps*, *project plans*, or *blueprints*, we embark on what we imagine will be a long and difficult expedition. We start to foresee all sorts of obstacles – most of which do not actually exist, as we will see later in this paper. But we find ourselves believing that the *milestones* we invented are real, and we get anxious when they don't appear on the horizon.

This approach misrepresents change as a *controllable process* composed of a sequence of *discrete stages*, *phases* or *steps*; and it deludes us into thinking we have to make a map for getting from the current state of affairs to the *desired state*. It is clear that this approach also trivializes change. We call this flawed approach to bringing about the new *Planned Change*.



By framing change as a journey, we fall into the trap of mistaking organizational development with a complicated problem

Planned Change has profound consequences for what we commonly think change management is all about: Which is of course *planning & controlling the change journey*. The journey metaphor, however, tricks us into ignoring the possibility that desired change might be accomplished quickly, with little effort, right now, with existing resources and with minimal disruption. The metaphor itself makes change hard. Set that against a different assumption:

Profound transformation never takes more than two years—regardless if it's about an organization with 20 people, or 200.000.

Or: Imagine spilling a tiny bit of milk into coffee. With this tiny nudge, a new pattern is instantly being created: It will be altogether different from the original one, which was “pure coffee”. The change is permanent: There is no way of returning to the first pattern.

Change is like adding milk to coffee.



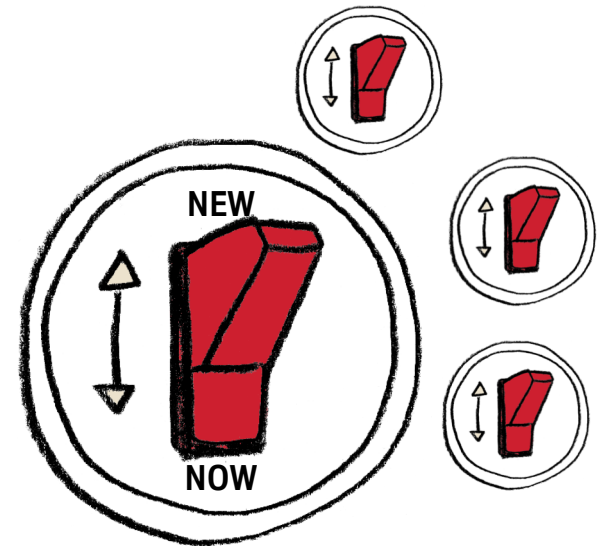
Organizational change is more like adding milk to coffee.

This is much more similar to what organizational change actually resembles, rather than calling change a *journey*. The change-as-adding-milk-to-coffee is thus a more helpful metaphor than the widespread notion of seeing change as a “journey from here to there”.

It means to envision activities related to organizational development, or change work as *flips from Now (the current state) to New (the desired state)*. What is important: Both the Now and the New are in the present, not in the future! The New can be produced right here, right now.

Profound change, different from problem solving, requires a sequence of flips. Or many flips.

Creating profound change means sequenced flipping the system from Now to New—right here, right now. A thousand times or more.



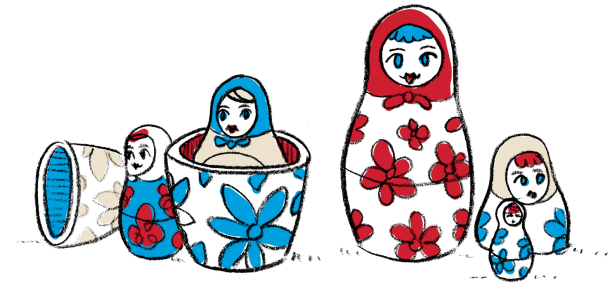
Change-as-Flipping calls for intentionally intervening on an organization's system. Many many times.

Insight 2.

There is no such thing as *Resistance to Change* - only smart responses to dumb *methods*

The man who invented *Resistance to Change* is *Kurt Lewin*, arguably. Lewin, the brilliant founder of social psychology and of the field of organizational change as such, introduced the term *resistance* as a systems concept: as a *force* affecting managers and employees equally. Unfortunately, only the terminology, but not the context, became popularized later: We now cast resistance as a psychological, or an individualized issue, usually personalizing it as “employees versus managers”.

In this mental model, it is always *the others*. Employees *resist*, top management “isn’t fully committed”, stakeholders “don’t get it”. We judge others saying things like: *They have an interest in preserving the status quo*. The *They* is very important, of course. The resistance assumption is implicitly presumptuous. It will always lead to blaming, not progress. As long as we accept the mental model of “they against us”, and of “people resisting the change itself”, this belief will misinform our understanding of change dynamics, perpetuating command-and-control organizational models and misery at work. It would be better to let go of the term *Resistance to Change* and embrace other, more



Change dynamics are complex & rich. Flippantly tagging people’s behavior in changing situations as “resistance to change”, and people as “resisters” is a huge mistake.

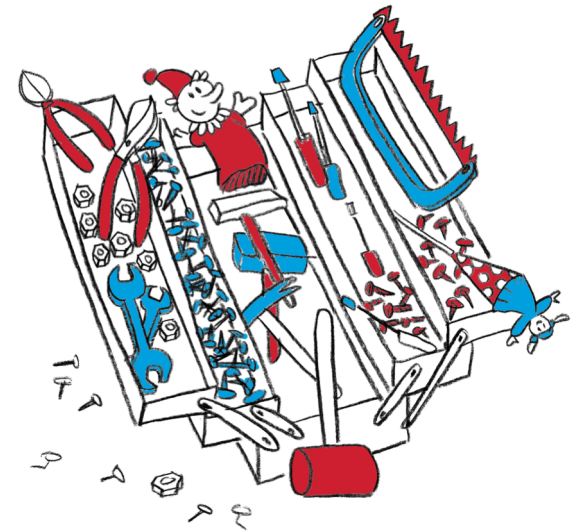
helpful mental models for change. Let's give it a try:

People do not resist change.

Can you say that to yourself, in your head? Now that is a start. But what is behind the strange behavior, then, that we are observing all the time, in our change efforts, if it is *not* resistance to change?

Take a step back and you will see that people actually act consciously and intelligently (overall), *towards other things than the change itself*. They may *resist* loss of status and power—which is quite intelligent. They may *resist* injustice, stupidity and being changed. Which is also intelligent. The change may also cause need for learning that is not properly addressed. All of these are things that we really should deal with when developing organizations: power structures, status, injustice, consequence, our own stupidity, top-down command-and-control, and learning.

Instead of watching out for the possibility of resistance, we should watch out for common mistakes in implementing change and deal with the perfectly natural reactions to (our) poor interventions.



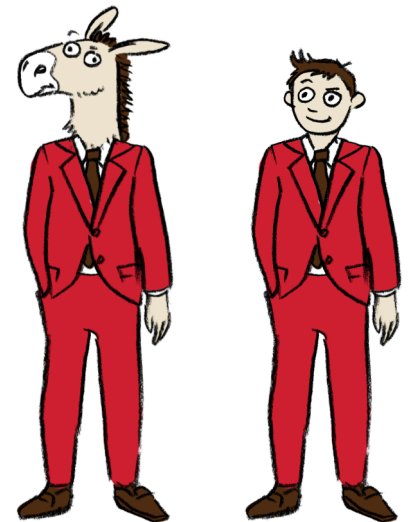
To humans, the change itself is not the problem. It is lousy change methods they resist!

In other words:

**The more resistance to change you observe,
the more likely it is that your methods suck.**

Let us be clear: *The notion that people resist change* is not held up by social sciences. It is actually completely opposed to our scientific knowledge about human capability to change (Alan Deutschman wrote a wonderful, summarizing book about this). It is a fairy-tale that people resist the change, or that people find change itself hard or problematic. It is a toxic myth that people are supposedly *afraid of change*, or that they have *comfort zones*:
People, just like their contexts, change all the time!

What we observe, then, are *symptoms of struggle with adaption and with the new* which should never be confused with resistance to the change's intent. Once you start the kind of projection that confuses *behavior in situations of adaptation* with resistance, that is when trouble starts. As humans, we tend to have a hard time imagining future possibilities, though. This is why change efforts have to deal with the need for *imagination, or visioning*. With *creating insight, or learning*.



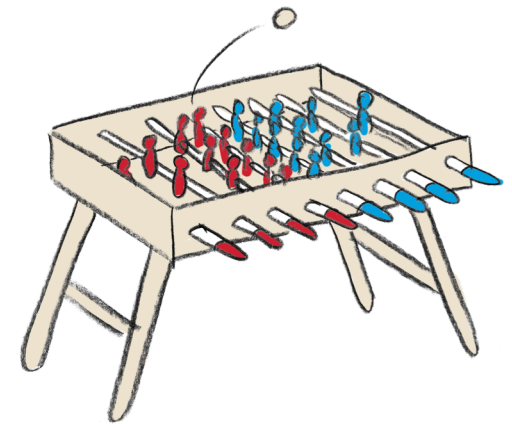
Are people the problem, in change and organizational development, or is it our change methods that usually are the problem?

Insight 3.

The problem is in the *system* - almost always

If resistance does not come from people, then where does it reside? Resistance is much more likely to be found in the organization's system. Edwards W. Deming said: "94% of the problems in business are system-driven and only 6% are people-driven." Which means: If the problem is in the system, almost always, then change should mostly be about working on the system.

Removing obstacles in the system to promote profound change is clearly easier than introducing entirely new features, rituals or memes within a given system. This is what makes *Organizational Hygiene*, another concept, or *Complexitool* we created in the BetaCodex Network, such a compelling idea. But whether you are *removing something*, or *introducing something new while flipping from Now to New*: Intervening for change effectively in organizations requires specific, targeted action—not blaming. Which means: If the anticipated change will result in the loss of status by some employees, then we must develop strategies for dealing with that loss of status. Likewise, if the interventions will result in the loss of jobs, that issue must be dealt with. If the change will result in the need for learning, then let's take care of that.



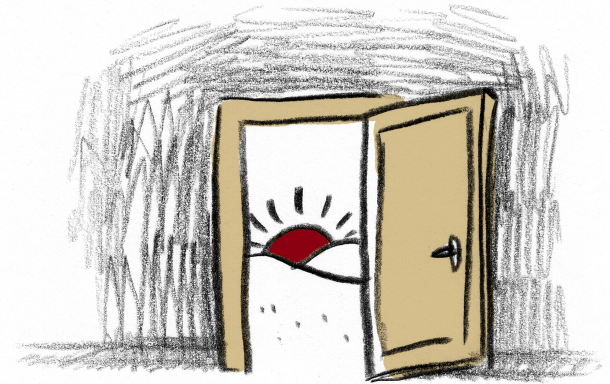
You can blame the ball, of course. A more systemic reaction would be to ask: "What in the design of the game allowed that to happen?"

If the change will come at a cost, then there should be space for emotions and mourning. Labeling these difficult, real-life problems as resistance to change only impedes the change effort. Resistance from people towards interventions then becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Put differently:

**Change work done well does not produce losers.
Only consequences.**

Power interests are also very real and often ignored by *change agents*. And they shouldn't. John Kotter, another one of our heroes, stated that individual resistance out of self-interest exists, but that it is "rare". More often, he said, the obstacle is in the organization's structure or in a "performance appraisal system [that] makes people choose between the new vision and their own self-interest". In other words:

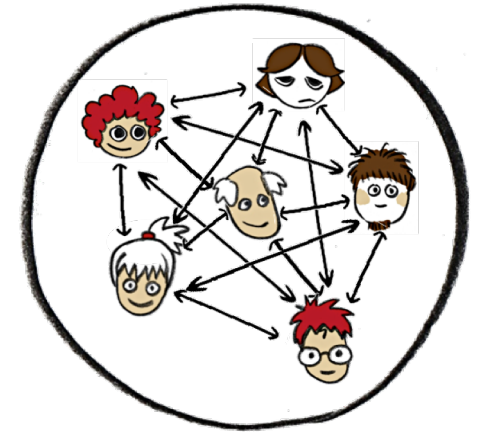
**What we interpret as resistance to change
is usually an intelligent response to inconsistencies
between the organizational model
and the desired state.**



*We do not need revolution.
We only have to create
coherent systems that differ
from command-and-control
systems. Simple as that.*

Change work, in this sense, is successive re-negotiation of the organizational model—not revolution! Kotter’s “NoNo” has good reasons, in his own mind, to oppose the change—reasons that are probably triggered by the current system, not the individual’s twisted psyche. Again: What we observe, then, should ultimately be coined *lack of consequence*, not *resistance to change*.

Which all leads us back to the conclusion: In *change-as-constant-flipping*, we must *work the system, not the people*. Diverting from this path leads to blaming, and almost inevitable to self-induced failure of our change efforts.



Do we want to continue working the people, or do we want to start working the system, together?

Insight 4.

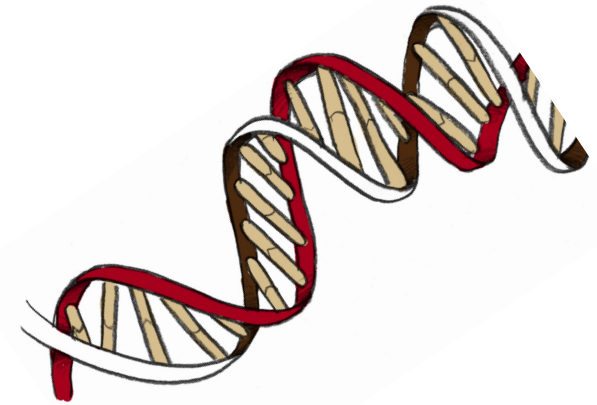
Org change is *socially dense* - *technique* is (almost) trivial

The idea of *Change-as-Flipping*, or *Emergent Change*, or *continuous flipping from Now to New* acknowledges that change happens within complex patterns that cannot be fully predicted or controlled—but only observed. One of the first to describe this kind of thinking on change coherently was John Kotter. His *Leading Change* approach from the 1990s neatly outlined *profound change as dense, social movement: The collective, emergent side of change*, so to speak.

The element that was still missing from this change approach is the *individual side* of change. By which we do not mean mere individual learning, or growth, but *the need for individual adaptation* that members of an organization must undergo *to make flips happen or when flips happen*. Adding the *individual side of org change* to the *collective side*, one starts to perceive change as multi-dimensional. We call this the *double helix* nature of change.

Many change agents are enamored with their method of choice. Many of us like to believe that this or that method or tool is wonderful, effective and impactful.

Change-as-Flipping, however, is based on the assumption that:



Organizational change is of “double helix nature”: It has a collective and an individual string – neither to be ignored. Individual change follows collective change – not the other way around!

Relationship is everything, method is secondary!

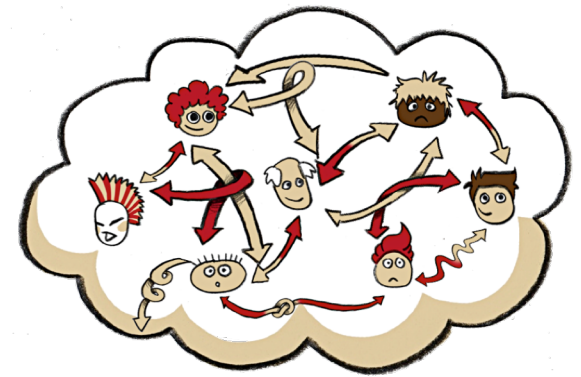
There are many decent, or effective methods, but what really matters is not the methods we employ, but *that our methods impact the relationships between the parts of the system*, as Russell Ackoff would say. Creating different relationships within the system, and of higher quality, that is the point of Change-as-Flipping.

While Change-as-Flipping aims at the interactions between the parts (of the system), it acknowledges both the individual and the collective side of change.

Many methods may help achieving that. In fact, the more complex the problem is, the more complex, or social, the method must be. Nothing is worse than crystallized method—or “dead” method, applied to living problems.

Method must always be appropriately complex, and social.

We have explored this aspect of change and complexity-robust method further in our *Secrets of Very Fast Organizational Transformation* paper (BetaCodex white paper No. 15).



Organizational development is all about interactions, or about the communication between the parts. Change the interactions, and the system will change!

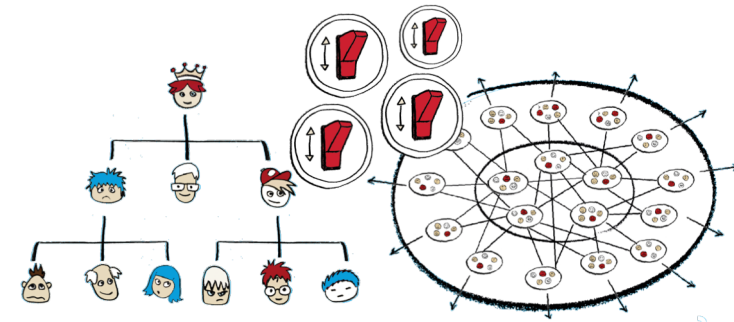
Insight 5.

There is no such thing as *transformation* - instead, *everything's an intervention*

We are guilty. We are guilty of talking about transformation ourselves. A lot, to be honest. And we enjoyed it! We sometimes like to say things like: “*Organizations should transform from the organizational model of the industrial age (“Alpha”) to a contemporary, complexity-robust one (“Beta”).*” We keep saying that kind of thing, occasionally, even though we know the term *transformation* is neither helpful, nor accurate. Sometimes we just can't help it! The truth, however, is probably closer to: There is no transformation. Never, ever. Because:

Constant flipping is the only thing there is in change.

This is consistent with the old adage *Everything is an intervention*. Which is one of the most beautiful things that has ever been said about organizational development and change (which, by itself, is probably a rather misleading term, too). That *everything is an intervention* does not mean that every intervention is *good in itself*. It merely highlights that everything, really everything, influences, or potentially *flips* an organization.

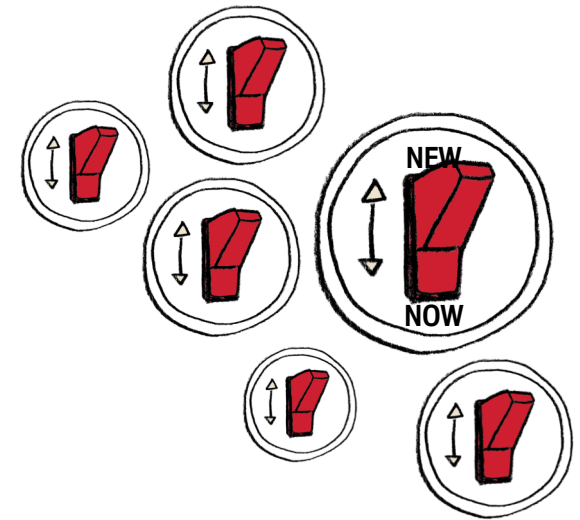


*Everything is an intervention.
And if you want it to be a particularly good one, make it one that flips the organization from Alpha to Beta!*

Instead of change management, we should practice the craft of *change as exercising constructive irritation*—as we like to say in systems theory. According to systems theory, the only thing you can do is to *irritate a system*. Then observe the consequences and ripple effects. Then irritate again. Then observe. And so on.

Any irritation can flip the system into the New state. If you are lucky and if the irritation was smart enough, that New state is a form of desired state.

In any case: irritate again. This is never supposed to be over. It's not a journey, remember? Welcome to the world of, well: *Eternal flipping*.



While change management usually leads to “working the people”, Change-as-Flipping consistently adheres to “working the system, together.”

About this paper. Further reading recommendations

This white paper is based on the article *Now to New: How to Flip Your Company to Perpetual Beta*, published by Niels Pflaeging in January 2015. The article was edited and expanded, and illustrations added. The illustrations were taken from the *Organize for Complexity* and *Complexitools* books. They were crafted by Pia Steinmann, pia-steinmann.de.

We recommend the following, related papers, articles and books:

- **BetaCodex Network white paper No. 11:** Org Physics – Explained, 2011
- **BetaCodex Network white paper No. 15:** Secrets of Very Fast Organizational Transformation (VFOT), 2019
- **Dent, Eric:** Challenging “Resistance to Change”, from: *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 35 (1), 25-41.
- **Deutschman, Alan:** *Change or Die*, 2007
- **Kotter, John:** *Leading Change*, 1996
- **Leith, Jack Martin:** The “flipping” and “Now to New” wording/idea from this article were inspired by Jack’s wonderful writing.
- **Pflaeging, Niels:** *Organize for Complexity*, 2015
- **Pflaeging, Niels/Hermann, Silke:** *Complexitools*, 2019

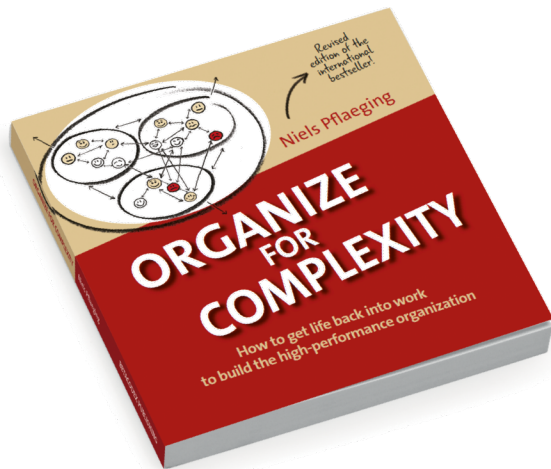


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