FOUR MODES OF CHANGE:
TO, FOR, WITH, BY

Most planned change within the aviation industry is top-down. But it is not the only way, and is not always the best way. In this article, **Cormac Russell** contrasts four different kinds of change: TO, FOR, WITH, and BY. This can be a useful framework to recognise and improve how changes are approached in your organisation.

KEY POINTS

- **Four modes of change are active in any organisation, for safety and other goals. All have their place, but some are more appropriate than others, depending on the change and situation.**

- **The TO mode is when change is done to us, without us. This is the most authoritarian form of change, where change is imposed, often to serve a distant agenda.**

- **The FOR mode is when change is done for us, without us. This is a benevolent form of top-down change, where change is still imposed, but is thought to serve a genuine need,**

- **The WITH mode is when change is done for us, with us. This is a participative form of change, where change is done collaboratively, and is generally recognised as serving a genuine need.**

- **The BY mode is when change is done by us, for us. This is an empowered form of change, where change is done by those who do the work, without requiring permission, and serves a genuine need.**

In this article, I reflect on some of my experience in over 35 countries around the world, from communities that are probably like yours to communities in extreme situations, which are facing or want change. What I see from working with groups of people are four modes of change. These modes apply to organisations too, and apply to safety-related changes and more general changes that affect you.

The Four Modes of Change

TO – Change is done to us, without us

This is the most authoritarian form of change, where change is imposed, often to serve a distant agenda. This form of change is often felt as **decided without us to be done to us**. It's a model that typifies top-down, command-and-control management. The change is often seen as unwanted, unnecessary and ill-informed. The TO approach, even when carried out with good intentions, is seen as being heavy-handed and to the benefit of others, meeting resistance and resentment. This approach to change is increasingly questioned, as it is seen as is ill-suited for modern work. Examples of the TO mode of change might include imposed changes to working hours, reporting, imposed shift patterns, or reorganisations that are not seen to benefit staff.

FOR – Change is done for us, without us

This is a benevolent form of top-down change, where change is still imposed, but is thought to serve a genuine need, and may indeed be seen as servicing a genuine need – depending on the effectiveness of change management. This form of change is often felt as **chosen for us then provided for us**. It's a model of change that is sometimes necessary, but when used inappropriately, can result in top-down dependency ("nothing changes around here unless they do it!"), and resources that can be lost at any point in the future. It can also result in imagined needs not being met ("this is not what we wanted!"), resulting in disappointment and disillusionment when change does not occur as imagined ("they always break their promises!"). Examples of the FOR mode of change include changes to software and equipment, building refurbishment, or feedback meetings organised by management.

WITH – Change is done for us, with us

This is a participative form of change, where change is done collaboratively, and is generally recognised as serving a genuine need. The change is still essentially top down, and needs permission from the management, but also involvement from staff. This form of change is often felt as **consulted with us on what to do with us**. This is often the most appropriate model for organisations, and can bridge the gap between management and staff, or between different sections of an organisation. But it can also fail to embed sustainable change unless the participative approach is well-designed and is embedded in the organisational structure and culture. A positive example can be found in the article by István Hegedus on dramatisation of safety investigation in *HindSight* 25.

BY – Change is done by us, for us

This is an empowered form of change, where change is done by those who do the work, without the need for permission, and serves a genuine need. In the BY mode of change, we discover, connect and mobilise assets that are found in and between people, and in places at work. In this mode we realise, develop and spread these strengths. This may involve getting support from the organisation, but is done without formal permission or 'sign off'. This form of change may need an 'animator' or 'alongsider' to offer help or facilitation. This form of change is often felt as **done by us, for us**. This mode of change tends to work out from the small and local level, and tends to involve relationship-building and specific change-making efforts. Examples can be found in *HindSight* magazine, e.g., the article by Rob Hackett in this issue on theatre hats in healthcare, and the article by Juan Antonio Lombo Moruno on ATC simulation in *HindSight* 27.

For each change effort we plan or encounter, we might ask:
1. Which mode of change is being applied?
2. Is this the appropriate mode for this change?
3. If not, what is the more appropriate mode of change that meets more stakeholder needs and helps to connect and mobilise existing assets, including our own?
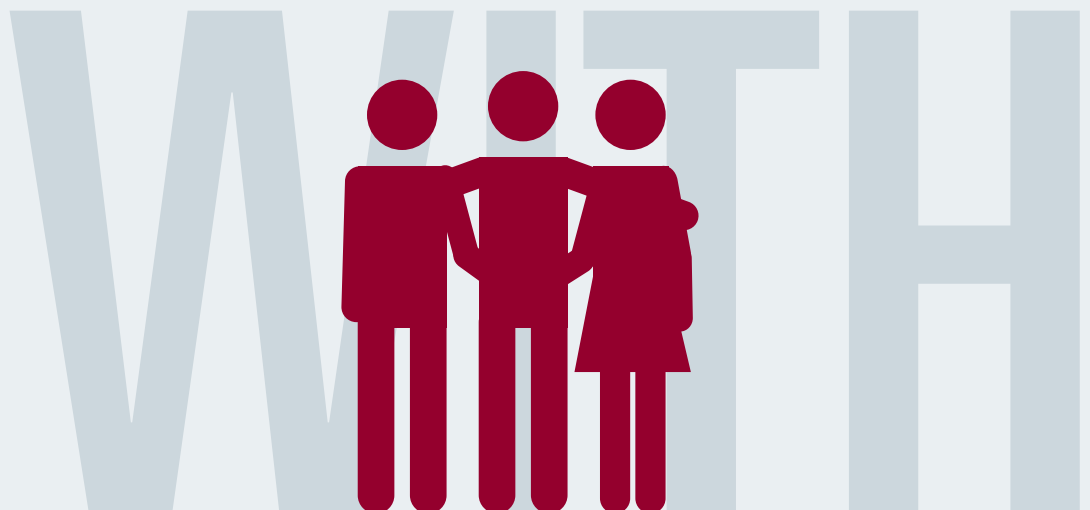
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> "When change is done to people they experience it as violence. When change is done by people they experience as liberation."

While all four modes of change have their place, there is a sequence by which each should be considered:

1. Start with what people can do themselves collectively, without any outside help (BY).
2. Then look at what they can do with a little outside help (WITH).
3. Finally, once these local assets have been fully connected and mobilised, decide collectively on what you want others to do for you (FOR).

In this issue of *HindSight*, we see several examples of top-down change with inadequate bottom-up involvement. Many of these sorts of changes have unintended consequences. Instead of people with relevant expertise and relationships creating change or adapting to change because they are trusted by those that are meant to support them, we sometimes end up with people whose expertise and relationships are ignored, and who are 'done to' or 'done for'. The more you 'do

to' or 'do for' people that they can do for themselves, the more you diminish their capacity and 'social capital': the relationships within and between groups that form trust, relatedness, and collective capacity (see *HindSight* 26, Editorial). Rosebeth Moss-Kanter, a professor at Harvard Business School got to the heart of the problem when she said: *"When change is done to people they experience it as violence. When change is done by people they experience as liberation."* Where things must be done TO people, the principle of free, prior, informed consent should normally apply.

The reason for this sequence is to reduce inappropriate dependency on management or outside agencies for changes that could be better done more locally. Here is an example. I recently co-facilitated a series of small group conversations in ATM. One example of desired change was for people to be more friendly with each other at work.

-   A BY approach might be for people to form informal associations at work (e.g., around sport, hobbies), and to organise coffee mornings, to send fewer emails and walk to see people instead, to organise barbeques, etc.
-   A WITH approach might be a joint approach with management to find ways to connect, formally and

informally (e.g., on project teams, organised coffee mornings).
-   A FOR approach might be a behaviour change or campaign or 'nudge' by an organisation (e.g., aiming to smile more, to meet people more), or an away day.
-   A TO approach might be a structural reorganisation and changes to offices.

The order of considering each mode of change is important. When we start with change done FOR or TO people, as often is the case, we preclude people's individual and collective power, and therefore choose autocratic or technocratic solutions over democratic and community solutions.

Toward WITH and BY

So how can we look to move more from the TO and FOR modes of change, toward WITH and BY? The WITH mode is sometimes called 'co-design' and 'co-production'. The BY mode is sometimes, in natural communities, known as ABCD, or Asset-Based Community Development. ABCD has a number of principles, adapted below to better translate to change in organisations:

-   We cannot know what a community needs until they first know what they have.
-   Every community has more gifts, skills, talents and resources than any one person or organisation can know, and these are easily disabled by professional intervention.
-   These gifts, skills, talents and resources need to be identified, brought together and converted into change by the community.
-   Top down change should do no harm to the first three principles, and ideally conforms to them.
-   Taken in the round, ABCD calls for a shift towards a capacity-oriented approach to change where people are not viewed as passive recipients of change, but as producers or co-producers of change.

The BY mode is sometimes the least familiar in organisations, when we become dependent on others 'high up' to create change that we could sometimes create for ourselves, especially when it comes to the bedrock of all technical and operational change: relationships!

Based on more than 20 years of working with local communities and seeing how change happens for the better with people, here are a few ideas that might work for you:

1. Connect informally (e.g., via existing groups and associations) to help build social bonds within groups and bridges between groups. Change is easier with good relationships established.
2. Discover and connect the gifts, skills and passions that exist within your colleagues, within and (especially) outside of your own department. Discover also the assets within the organisation (usable spaces, rooms, chairs, white boards, means of communicating, etc).
3. Recruit an animator or facilitator to help host and bring about conversations and change efforts.
4. Host conversations to discover what people care about enough to act on, and the assets they require to address shared priorities.
5. Build connections through social interaction, especially face to face.
6. Develop a shared vision.
7. Implement the change together.
8. Celebrate your achievements.

Expanding the BY space

To expand the BY space – and create the possibility for more bottom up change – I offer the following questions to you and your colleagues to ask yourselves:
- *What would you love to do if three of your colleagues were willing to help?*
- *What do we care about enough to take action on?*
- *What are the things that we can do – or should do – to create change?*
- *What would it take to get others involved?*
- *What are the things that we can lead and achieve with the support of management or others?*
- *What gifts (things you were born with), skills (things you have practiced/ learned to do), passions (things you care about and are acting on or want to act on) could we tap into to address and realise our dreams, or address the concerns we have?*

Specifically for organisational management and leaders:
- *What will we do, stop doing, or not do, that will help to discover and enlarge free space, which can be used for change by staff?*

I don't offer these reflections as a how to guide, but rather as a 'how others have tried and are still figuring out' guide. It may be that in their efforts you might find the inspiration to see, understand, and do what you and your colleagues can and should do. ⧄

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Listen to a podcast interview 'Learning from Communities: A Conversation with Cormac Russell', by Steven Shorrock, and read the entire transcript, at http://bit.ly/HSCormac (58 mins). A short edited version of the interview is in HindSight 26. Watch Cormac Russell'sTEDx talk on 'Sustainable community development: from what's wrong to what's strong' at http://bit.ly/RussellTEDx.