

The background of the entire page is a light, warm-toned surface. It features several dark silhouettes of people in various poses. At the top, four people stand in a row, their shadows cast upwards. Below them, four more people are shown from a top-down perspective, appearing to be in motion or interacting. The overall composition is minimalist and evocative, suggesting themes of human diversity and movement.

WERELDEN VAN VERSCHIL

Hoe actoren in organisaties
vraagstukken in veranderprocessen
hanteren en creëren

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English summary

Organisational change tends to produce unsatisfactory results. Many authors state that the failure rate for management-implemented change processes is more than 70 per cent. Ever since change processes first became a subject of study in the social sciences, one of the questions has been why change processes are often so toilsome. Change managers are frequently in the dark as to why change processes fail and how change should be managed to attain the desired results. How can the change capacity of Dutch organisations be characterized? What are the most important barriers to change? How do groups within organisations vary in the way they perceive a change process? What change strategies do change managers use in realizing change initiatives? And what strategies are the most effective?

Theoretical perspectives on barriers to organisational change

There are three theoretical perspectives that are frequently used in literature to explain difficulties in change processes (Table 1):

Table 1: barriers to change from three theoretical perspectives

Organisation science perspective	Change process and management perspective	Social interpretive perspective
Characteristics of organisations	Characteristics of change processes	Characteristics of interaction processes between stakeholders involved
Unclear organisation goals and strategy	Unclear change goals	Lack of interaction between stakeholders
Technology not supportive of change process or out of date	Difficulties in realizing the technological aspect of change	Lack of sharing different perspectives
Rigid structure	Lack of information about change	Lack of sharing possible futures
Culture & leadership unsupportive of or resistant to change efforts	Tensions between individuals and groups caused by change efforts	Stereotyping and development of assumptions about others
Lack of job satisfaction as an impediment to change motivation	Timing of change efforts too fast or unclear	Confirmation of beliefs about others and of choices in favour of certain change strategies and ways of interacting
Political relationships and self interests of individuals and groups	No attention to creating support for change among organisation members Change managers fail to manage process well Line managers fail to guide and direct employees properly in realisation of change	Lack of interaction between stakeholders as a result

These three perspectives provide different explanations as to why change processes often fail to be successful. Organisation science perspectives explain barriers to change by referring to the characteristics of organisations and people in organisations. Change process and change management perspectives, on the other hand, explain barriers

to change by looking at the way change managers handle and manage change. The explanations offered by social interpretive perspectives refer to interaction processes between actors involved in change processes and to reinforced beliefs about how to manage change and how to approach others for change to be successful. These three perspectives provide interesting and useful insights that can help us understand why change is a difficult process. In addition, they make it clear that the assumptions underlying theoretical explanations for failure to change are often worlds apart. Organisation science perspectives focus on 'tangible' structures and patterns that can be assessed and evaluated objectively, as well as managed and changed, and as such they reflect a so-called functionalistic approach. Change management and change process perspectives, on the other hand, are based on the assumption that failure is in the hands of the people that are actually involved in the process of change. They acknowledge that people within organisations have different outlooks and frames of reference: worldviews are subjective. Change management and change process perspectives, therefore, reflect a so-called interpretive approach. It is up to the change managers to get to know and understand the different frames of reference and to select the appropriate approach to change. Social interpretive perspectives are also aware that there are differences between people's frames of reference. They view these differences as the result of interaction processes between people who are part of groups. People create their own realities and worldviews and make sense of what is going on intersubjectively in communication processes within and between groups. In this process they create shared perspectives but also conflicting worldviews and fixated beliefs.

Although these theoretical perspectives provide interesting explanations, the question remains what role organisation and change management characteristics and differences in perspectives really play in change processes and how difficulties in organisational change processes can be understood. In this dissertation '*worlds of difference: how actors in organisations handle and create problems in change processes*', I study the reasons why second order change processes go awry and what can be done to improve the current state of affairs. The goal of second order change processes is to improve or change an organisation or parts of it, like its structure, culture and the behaviour of individuals in the organisation. They are radical changes representing a transition from a known starting point to a desired goal. Non-routine problems concerning the fit between an organisation and its environment are often at the basis of second order change processes. Because of the complexity characterizing these processes, it is not completely clear what problems exist, nor are solutions and the course of changes defined.

Goals

The goals of this dissertation are of a scientific and methodological as well as a practical nature:

Scientific objectives

Understanding the causes and contexts of stagnating and failing change processes and obtaining knowledge about ways to solve problems that occur with regard to change processes.

1. Discover theoretical explanations for failure to change and provide insight into explanations from organisation science, change management studies and social interpretive approaches to barriers to change.

2. Study patterns and configurations in the approaches to and contexts of change.
3. Study choices that change managers make in favour of specific change strategies.
4. Study perspectives and differences in perspective among actors in change processes with regard to change processes, strategies and contexts.
5. Study beliefs, assumptions and paradigms underlying the choices that actors in change processes make.
6. Study interaction patterns and differences in change processes
7. Identify and handle complex problems in change processes

Methodological objectives

Apply and further develop applicable research methods and reflective action research into the course of change processes. Reflective action research is research through a continuous process of action, evaluation, and reflection on methods and theories, and on underlying assumptions, learning and the development of new action alternatives. Examine the usefulness of reflective action research to understand change processes.

1. Examine how survey feedback can be applied in stagnating change processes
2. Examine the applicability of reflective learning in stagnating change processes
3. Examine how narratives and causal loop diagrams can be used in reflective action research. Narratives are tales that describe situations and their consequences in specific situations. Causal loop diagrams in this dissertation are easily understandable patterns that reflect habitual ways of interacting.

Practical objectives

Help improve the success of change processes by conducting research in the context of changing organisations.

1. Understand the often laborious course of change processes
2. Provide action alternatives that improve the development of change processes and the management of complex problems
3. Develop methodical insights that help improve the success of change processes

Methods

I used several research methods, including literature study, survey research and case study research. The literature study provided insight into the barriers to change I described earlier. Survey research provided information about patterns and configurations, the change strategies that are selected by change managers and differences in perspective among actors in changing organisations. Case study research provided insight into change contexts, interaction patterns, underlying assumptions and differences in perspectives.

Survey

For the survey I used a questionnaire that provided insight into (a) organisational characteristics, (b) change process characteristics, (c) change perception characteristics, and (d) change strategies (Table 1).

Table 1: the questionnaire

ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS	
Goals and strategy	Clarity of the organisational goals, agreement about these goals, external orientation of its strategy, and degree of flexibility to deal with market demands and developments outside the organisation.
Technology	Available technology, clarity regarding the use of supporting systems, and usefulness of information technology for work procedures.
Structure	The organisation of work and decision-making about operations in an organisation.
Culture and leadership	This scale refers to opportunities for innovation, people-oriented leadership, and cooperation within an organisation.
Work	Workload, quality of work, relationships with colleagues, and career perspectives in an organisation.
Political relations	The interests of individuals and departments or teams, the division of influence, and the degree of competition in an organisation.
CHANGE PROCESS CHARACTERISTICS	
Change course	Clarity about the change objectives, agreement about these objectives and an understanding of the change strategy.
Technology	Complexity of technological adjustments, capacity for implementation of adjustments, and available technological support to effectuate the change.
Information	Amount and clarity of information regarding the change process and how an organisation supplies this information.
Tension	Tensions between and within teams or departments of an organisation resulting from the change and pressure on the existing culture.
Timing	Phasing and pace of the change process, clarity of phases, time for each phase and time to adopt the change, and the speed of the decision-making process concerning the change.
Creating support	Support from top managers, opportunities people have to influence the course of the change process, involvement of departments (and Works Council) in change processes, coaching of employees, possibilities for sharing experiences.
Change management	The competence of the change managers, their visibility, their attention to conflicting interests, and communication between change managers and employees.
Line managers	The role of line managers in the change process, the way they deal with the change and the realisation of goals, and the interaction with and involvement of their subordinates during the change process.
CHANGE PERCEPTION	
Expected outcome	Expectations of employees regarding the development and outcomes of the change process.
Support for change	Perceived necessity for the change and the desire of people to actively contribute to the change process.

CHANGE STRATEGY	
Power strategy	Controlled, top-down approach: employees are not involved in problem diagnosis, have little influence in development of change propositions, management of change permits few possibilities for input from employees, top management does not pay attention to workers' opinions, and changes are being carried through despite objections from the workforce.
Systematic change strategy	Systematic and methodological approach to change: fixed goals, a model or design that serves as a starting point for a new situation, fixed procedures and methods to bring about change, fixed planning for phases within the process, time control and deadlines.
Negotiation strategy	Approach aimed at negotiation with regard to wishes and interests: Opposing interests are made visible and receive attention, wishes and interests are subject to negotiation, problems with changes are open to discussion, there is consultation and discussion about changes between departments.
Programmatic change strategy	Incremental, iterative approach: approach is adapted to the course of change, to employees' work obligations and to the organisation's capacity for change and people in the organisation, changes and approaches to change are being evaluated and adjusted in the course of the process and the approach offers employees the opportunity to learn how to manage change themselves.
Dialogue	Interactive approach: the ideas and opinions among employees about change are the primary starting point in formulating change proposals, changes and approaches to change are developed together, different ideas and opinions are shared.

We collected the survey data from participants of three Dutch management-training institutes providing postgraduate change management courses for consultants and change managers. All the people who took part in these courses completed the questionnaire and were asked to distribute four copies within their organisation, both among actors involved in change management and among actors who were not, and about evenly among top- and line managers, staff members and employees. We thus collected five questionnaires per organisation. In all 3,054 respondents from 600 Dutch organisations took part in the survey. In addition to organisational characteristics, change processes, change perceptions and change strategies, the questionnaire addressed context factors. Table 2 provides an overview of the methods I used to analyse the survey data.

Table 2: methods of analysis survey research

GOAL	METHOD
1. Patterns	Categorical principal component analysis
2. Configurations	Hierarchical cluster analysis Non-hierarchical cluster analysis
3. Change strategy per configuration	Multivariate analysis of variance
4. Differences in perspectives	Pearson's Chi-square
5. Change effectiveness	Univariate analysis of variance

Naturalistic inquiry

Naturalistic inquiry served as the basis for the qualitative research in seven case studies. It provided insight into change contexts, interaction patterns, underlying assumptions and differences in perspective. Interactive research with people in organisations and personal diaries with notes of doubts and remarkable events provided insight into change contexts and contributed to the reflection on problems in change processes as well as the research process and methods. Analysing documents, interviews, surveys and survey feedback in interactive meetings also served as a test and deeper analysis of the survey results. In addition, they provided insight into the context of change and made it possible to study the interaction patterns between actors in changing organisations. They served as an application of reflective action research, and the insights they provided contributed to solving problems in change processes as well. Conversations in interactive meetings provided data for narrative analysis and causal loop diagramming (Table 3).

Table 3: methods of analysis naturalistic inquiry

GOAL	METHOD
1. Change context	Document analysis Conversations and interviews Survey Interactive research methods Research diaries
2. Differences in perspectives	Survey and survey feedback
3. Reasoning and assumptions	Narrative analysis Deconstruction
4. Interaction patterns and differences	Grounded theory Causal loop diagramming

Patterns and configurations in changing organisations

CATPCA provided insight into the patterns in changing organisations by displaying the relationships between configurations, change strategies and organisational characteristics. The analyses revealed two dimensions, the first of which is 'change capacity' (Figure 2), which provides the largest contribution to the explained variance. Characteristics of organisations, characteristics of change processes and perceptions of change have strong loadings on this dimension. Also, expected outcome, and support for change have strong loadings on the first dimension. This means that positive evaluations of characteristics of organisations, characteristics of change processes, and perceptions of change coincide with a positively evaluated change capacity. Also, interactive change strategies such as dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation coincide with a high change capacity.

The second dimension is 'control orientation'. Variables that strongly coincide with a high control orientation are a rigid structure, a high level of political behaviour and change-related tensions. Also, organisations where a large number of employees experience the consequences of change in their jobs appear to coincide with a large degree of

control. Additionally, the sector and the job description of the respondent coincide with the perceived degree of control orientation: there is a higher tendency to control in governmental organisations and among staff members. It is less common s in the profit sector and among younger members of an organisation. Finally, a systematic change strategy appeared to coincide strongly with high control orientation.

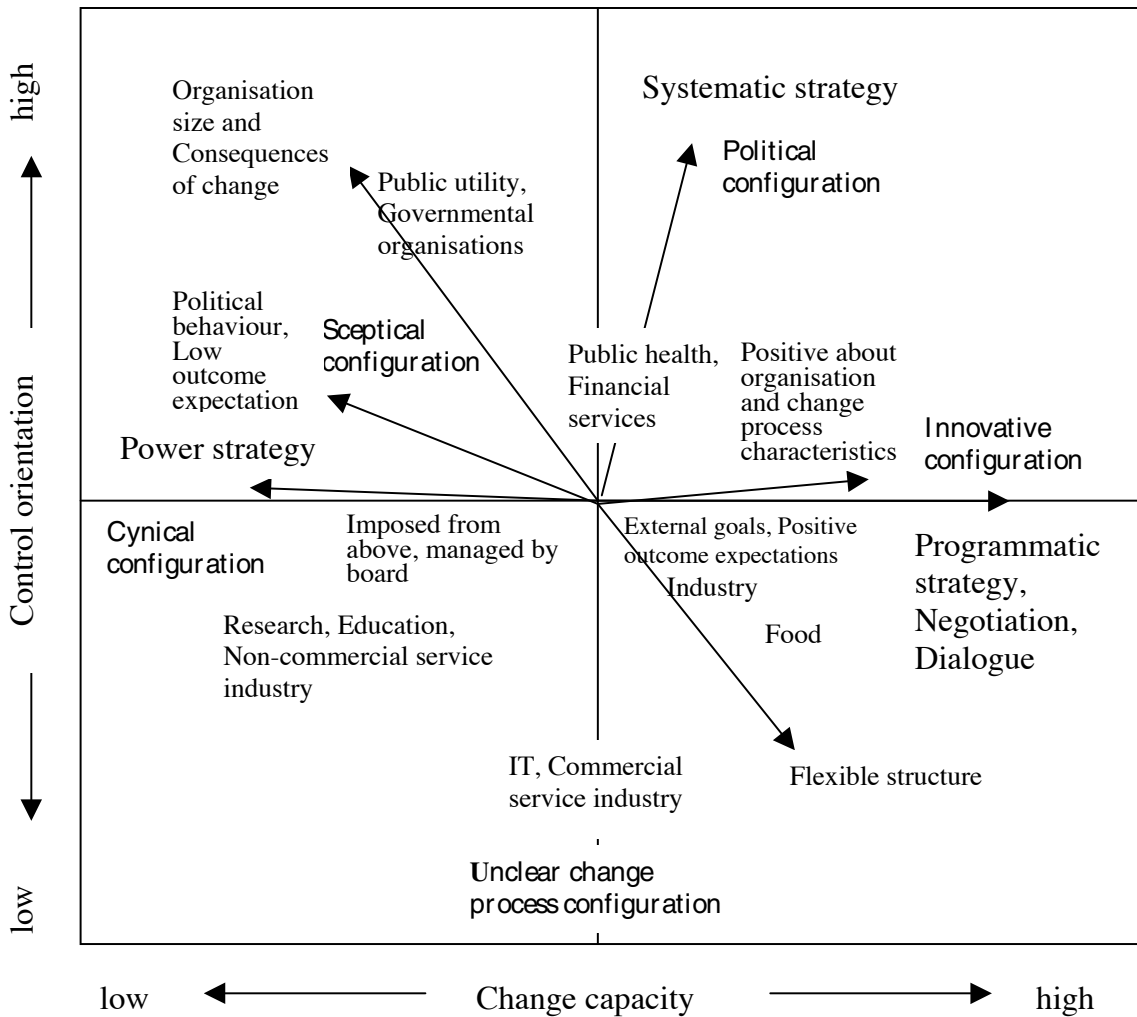


Figure 1: Patterns in changing organisations

Change strategies

The survey results indicate that change capacity coincides with change strategies (Figure 1). Negotiation, dialogue and programmatic change strategy, and some systematic change approaches are used in organisations that are characterized by a high capacity for change. People in these organisations are positive about the change process and the management of change. The expected outcome and support for change are high. In organisations with a limited change capacity and high control orientation, a systematic approach to change processes is adopted. Power is sometimes used, and there may be some attention to programmatic change and negotiation. Organisations with a moder-

ate to restricted change capacity and a low control orientation are characterized by an absence of systematic approaches to change. In organisations that characterized by a low capacity for change, managers deal with change using power strategies. People in these organisations have negative perspectives on the change process and change management. The expected outcome and support for change are low.

These results indicate that there is a relationship between change strategies and change capacity. In organisations where change managers choose interactive strategies like dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation, change capacity is high. In cases where interactive change strategies are combined with systematic strategies, there is a correlation with a reasonably high change capacity. However, when change is implemented in a non-systematic manner, the members of an organisation find the change capacity limited. When interactive change strategies, such as dialogue, negotiation and programmatic change are absent and power strategies are used, change capacity is very low.

Organisational and context characteristics

The survey results also indicate that change capacity and strategy coincide with organisational and context characteristics (Figure 1). A high change capacity and interactive change strategies can be found in relatively small organisations that have a reasonably flexible structure and moderate to low control orientation. The organisational structure is smooth and flexible and interrelations are not characterized by political behaviour. Change processes in these cases are often relatively small-scale. A limited change capacity and a systematic change approach can be found in large organisations characterized by a rigid structure, political behaviour, competition and tensions. Change processes here are often large-scale and have far-reaching consequences for the employees. A restricted change capacity, limited use of systematic change strategies and some negotiation can be found in relatively small organisations where there is a flexible structure and no political behaviour. Change processes are small-scale and do not cause tensions among the members of an organisation. When change capacity is low and power strategies are used to manage change, changes are frequently imposed from above. These processes are often large-scale and occur in large organisations. Control orientation is moderate, but obstacles to change can be identified both in the organisational characteristics and in the process of changing. Organisational characteristics are frequently evaluated negatively. Outcome expectation is low and there is relatively little support for change.

Sector

Finally, there appears to be a relationship between change capacity, change strategy and organisational characteristics, and the sector in which an organisation operates. In large non-profit organisations that employ highly educated professionals, such as universities, research and non-commercial service organisations, power strategies are used relatively frequently to 'implement' changes. According to members of these types of organisations, there is little room for dialogue, negotiation and programmatic change, and there is a frequent use of power strategies. This correlates with a very low change capacity.

Large bureaucratic organisations in public utility and government, financial service organisations and larger healthcare institutions are characterised by a hierarchical

structure, division of tasks and a systematic change strategy. In these organisations change involves a great deal of political behaviour. Changes cause friction among the members of organisations and between groups and departments, and consequently outcome expectations are low. Control orientation in these organisations is moderate to high.

Changes are frequently imposed from above and implemented from the top down. These change processes are often extensive in scope and are often characterized by powerful steering by top management. However, in some of these organisations there is some attention to dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation. When systematic change strategies are combined with power strategies, organisation members perceive the change capacity as low. When systematic change strategies are combined with interactive strategies, organisation members perceive the change capacity as limited. However, according to the participants in our survey, the course of change is however relatively clear. Information about the goals and process is provided, and change management pays attention to creating commitment for the change process. Moreover, change management has more of a managing role as compared to other organisations. In smaller organisations in the profit sector, people have more positive opinions about their organisation's change capacity. There is more attention to differences in perspective and goals are more often externally oriented. Profit organisations use mainly interactive change strategies, combined with some systematic approaches. Organisation members have more positive experiences with the impact of change; they have higher outcome expectations and support changes compared to organisations in the non-profit sector and governmental organisations. When there is no control orientation and changes are carried out in a non-systematic manner, the members of organisations view their organisation's change capacity as limited.

Five configurations

Five specific configurations representing specific positions on the two dimensions can be found in the data. These five configurations are graphically displayed in Figure 2. The graphs represent the opinions of the members of an organisation about the state of affairs in their organisations, about the change process and about their perception on change. Bars pointing to the left represent negative evaluations; bars pointing to the right represent positive evaluations. The five configurations are the innovative configuration, the sceptical configuration, the cynical configuration, the political configuration, and the configuration with an unclear change process.

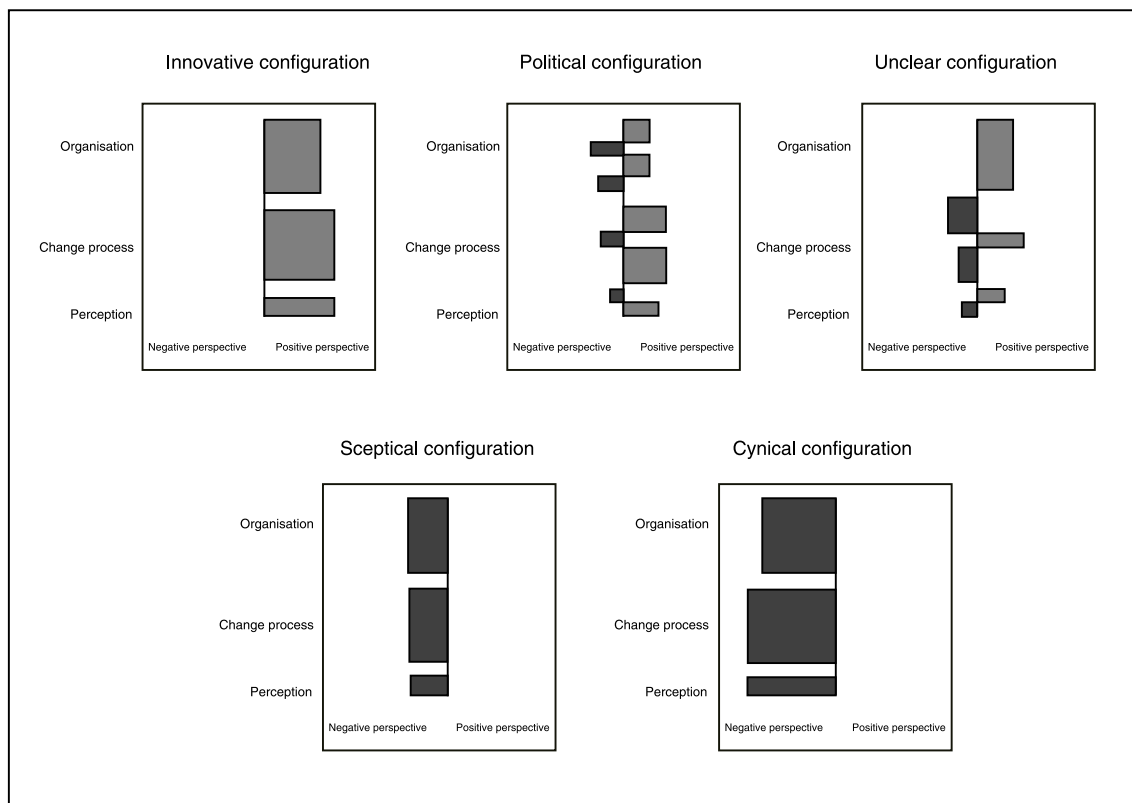


Figure 2: Five configurations

Innovative configuration

In the innovative configuration, respondents have a positive attitude both toward the state of affairs in the organisation and toward the aspects of the change process (Figure 2). Almost 21% of all respondents belong to this configuration, which is characterized by a clear organisational strategy and a smooth structure. Procedures and rules are not too strict, but not entirely absent either. Innovative organisations have a pleasant culture, are characterized by good relationships between employees and management, and political behaviour is relatively absent. This positive context is reflected in the way in which change processes are managed. In the innovative configuration, change management pays much attention to the *process* of change. The direction in which the change will develop is clear, the changes do not cause friction, the timing of changes is correct and the changes are supported. The members of the organisation have confidence in change management and a positive view of their line managers' roles. They have high outcome expectations and support for change is high.

Political configuration

In the political configuration, the organisational structure is characterized by rigid rules and regulations. Groups and individuals in the organisation mainly pursue their own interests, exercise power, and changing evokes tensions among organisation members. Of all respondents in the data, 25% experience change processes as politically charged. Although organisation members are moderately positive about aspects of the

change process, they have a low outcome expectation. They are nevertheless prepared to contribute to the process, possibly based on the idea that 'if you do not participate, you lose'.

Unclear configuration

In the unclear configuration, organisational characteristics are evaluated positively. Changes, on the other hand, are experienced as vague and not very transparent. Eighteen percent of all respondents fall into this category. Although the members of an organisation in this category are given little information with regard to the changes, there is little tension among them and their expected outcome is relatively high. However, it is possible that the changes do not affect them very much, as a result of which they may have no idea where and how they can contribute to the process.

Sceptical configuration

In the sceptical configuration, organisation members have a negative perspective on both organisational characteristics and the change process. Almost 23% of respondents have a sceptical perspective. Organisation members are confronted with rigidity, rules, procedures and political behaviour, and the exercise of power is not uncommon. The goals are obscure. Changes cause tension between groups and individuals and are characterized by time pressure. Change management pays little attention to creating support for changes and organisation members do not have much faith in change management and line managers. The result is a negative outcome expectation and low support for change.

Cynical configuration

In the cynical configuration, change management pays little attention to the process of change. Of all respondents, 13% have a cynical perspective. Both organisational characteristics and characteristics of the change process are perceived as barriers to a successful change process. Obscurity, rigidity, culture based on rules and procedures, political behaviour and conflicting interests characterize the organisation. People are unsure about what is happening, which causes them to feel tension and time pressure. Because no attempt is made to gain support for the change process in the organisation, people have little faith in change managers and in the role of line managers. Rigidity in context and process seem to coincide: rigidity in the organisation may be the main reason to initiate a change process, but at the same time it may obstruct change because of the impact it has on the choices that are made in the course of the process. The result of a rigid context and an awkwardly handled change process is a low outcome expectation and a lack of support for change.

Change strategies appear to coincide with configurations. When change managers choose interactive strategies such as dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation strategies, much more positive configurations can be found than when systematic and especially power strategies are chosen.

Five patterns in changing organisations

Combining the insights described above, we found there exists a relationship between configurations and change strategy, with cynical configurations being managed using power strategies and displaying low change capacity, and innovative configurations

being managed using programmatic change strategies and dialogue, and displaying high change capacity. Cynical and sceptical configurations represent negative opinions about organisational characteristics, while innovative configurations represent positive opinions. Each configuration appears to represent a specific combination of change strategy and organisational characteristics that can be found in specific sectors. This results in five patterns representing a unique combination of characteristics (Table 4).

Table 4: Five patterns of organisational and change process characteristics

Innovative configuration 21%	Political configuration 25%	Unclear change process configuration 18%	Sceptical configuration 23%	Cynical configuration 13%
<p>High change capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Well- functioning organisation - Change process handled well - High expected outcome - High estimated % chance of success - High support for change 	<p>Limited change capacity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Rigid organisation, political behaviour - Many tensions in change process - Moderate expectation of outcome - High estimated % chance of success - Desire for influence and involvement in the process 	<p>Restricted change capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reasonably well-functioning organisation - Unclear change process - Reasonable expected outcome - Reasonable estimation of % chance of success - Little support for change 	<p>Low change capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Badly functioning organisation - Awkwardly handled change process - Low expected outcome - Moderate estimation of % chance of success - No support for change 	<p>Very low change capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organisation functioning under pressure - Badly handled change process - Very low expected outcome - Low estimated % chance of success - Resistance to change
<p>Interactive strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Interactive strategy with high involvement of employees through dialogue and negotiation and a certain management of change through a systematic change approach 	<p>Programmatic strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Systematic strategy with a certain involvement of employees and negotiation 	<p>Negotiation strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainly negotiation strategy with unclear plan for the future and unclear management by top 	<p>Systematic strategy with power strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainly systematic strategy with exertion of power by top management and little involvement of employees 	<p>Power strategy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Mainly exertion of power by top management, little involvement of employees
<p>Adhocratic organisations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderate to low control orientation - Open to environment - Flexible structure 	<p>Arena organisations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderate to high control orientation - Under the influence of environment 	<p>Service industry</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Low control orientation - Open for environment - Flexible structure 	<p>Control oriented bureaucracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderate to high control orientation - Closed for environment - Rigid structure 	<p>Professional bureaucracy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Moderate control orientation - Closed to environment - Flexible structure

Innovative configuration 21%	Political configuration 25%	Unclear change process configuration 18%	Sceptical configuration 23%	Cynical configuration 13%
Adhocratic organisations - Small independent units - Autonomy in work - Small-scale changes	Arena organisations: - Political behaviour in rigid structure - Tensions between units - Striving for autonomy - Large-scale changes	Service industry - Little political behaviour - Autonomy in work - Small-scale changes	Control oriented bureaucracy - Competition - Lack of autonomy - Large scale and lengthy change processes	Professional bureaucracy - Large organisation consisting of small and independent units - Autonomy in work - Large scale change processes
Sector - Small organisations in knowledge-intensive service industry - Industrial and food producing industry	Sector - Medium-sized organisations in service and financial industry - Central and regional government - Local government - Large organisations in healthcare services	Sector - IT - Service industry - Small educational organisations	Sector - Large organisations in financial services - Large organisations in healthcare services - Central government - Large executing governmental organisations - Large public utility organisations	Sector - Large-scale research and educational institutions - Non-commercial service organisations

Differences in perspective on change strategies

The results of the research provide insight into the differences in perspective between various actors in an organisation. Managing directors, for instance, have the highest scores in terms of change capacity. They appear satisfied with their organisation as well as with the change process, and seem convinced of the interactive character of their change strategies. Members of the Works Council, employees and consultants, on the other hand, show much lower scores in this area. Apparently, they do not share the positive perspective that their managing directors have. Moreover, they do not experience the interactive approach that top managers claim to use. Figure 2 provides a picture of the change strategies that are used most often in change processes according to the various actors.

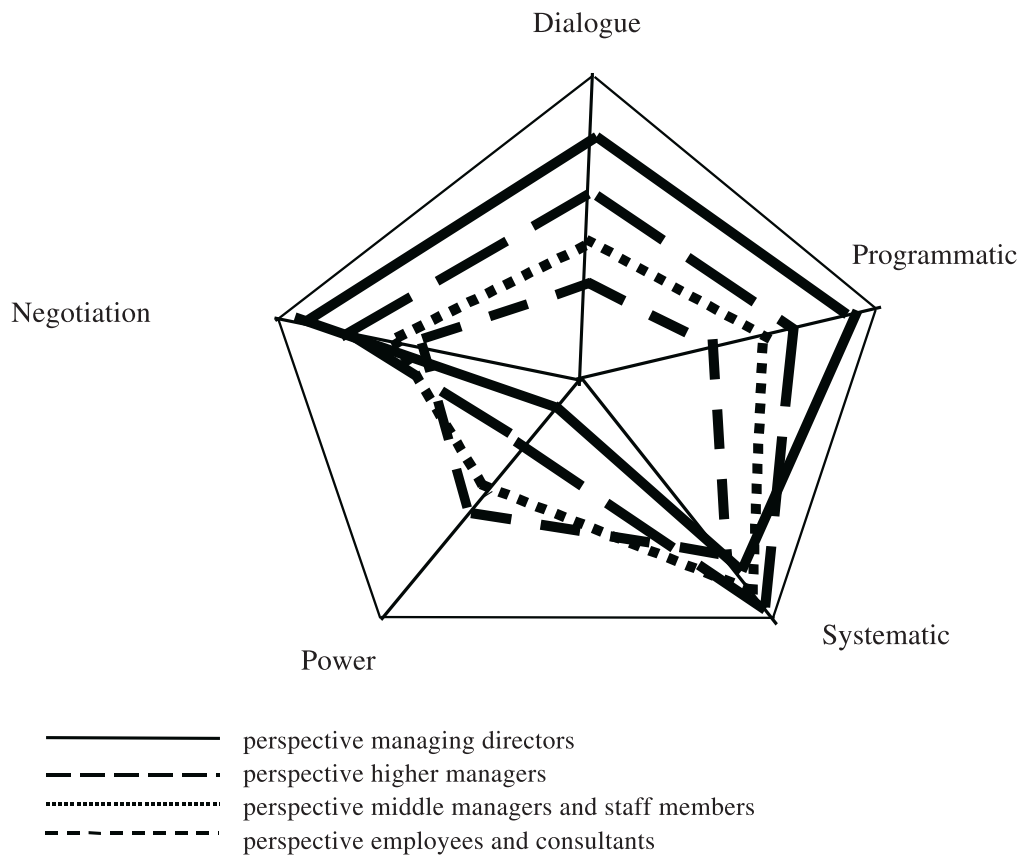


Figure 2: Perspectives on change strategies used in change processes

All actors in changing Dutch organisations agree that change is above all a systematically planned process (Figure 2). Perspectives on the interactive and power strategies, however, vary depending on the actors' positions in the organisation.

Managing directors mostly perceive change as a process that is managed interactively. Higher managers perceive change as an interactive process as well, although they have more moderate perspectives than managing directors. Most of all, they perceive change as a systematic process that can be planned using blueprints and phases. Middle managers and staff members perceive changes as systematically planned, and they experience some interactive strategies. Both employees and consultants experience more power and less interactive strategies than managing directors and higher managers claim to use. Their perception of change is the least systematic of all.

When we look at the differences in perception between those who actively manage change processes and those who play a more passive role, the impression that emerges is that those at the top display a rather self-satisfied attitude. They also reflect a discrepancy between the *espoused theory* and the *theory in use* among top managers: what top managers claim to do apparently does not correspond with what they actually do.

Understanding the change processes and offering action alternatives

Seven in-depth case studies in different organisations support the results from the survey research. In the seven case studies we found a coherence between organisational characteristics and change capacity. Apparently organisation science provides useful explanations for the difficulties experienced in change processes. The case studies illustrate that a situation where there are interactive change strategies and an exchange of ideas and information contributes to change and correlates with high outcome expectations. When change processes are imposed from above, whether or not combined with a systematic change approach, the outcome expectations are low, as is the support for change. An externally oriented process, a clear change strategy, incremental implementation, clear goals and planning and a well-considered timing also contribute to the success of change processes if they are combined with interactive change strategies. Apparently, change process and change management perspectives provide useful insights that help us understand success and failure of change processes.

Beliefs, assumptions, paradigms and interaction patterns

The results from the survey and the case studies indicate that the classical organisation concept, with a separation between thinking and acting, is the dominant form of organisation. Most managers choose a classical, functionalistic way of organising and changing. Change is apparently perceived as an activity that can be systematically planned, managed and implemented rather than a process where people create a new future together. The question is how people involved in change processes make choices and why they often make choices that generate little positive results? Are change managers governed by the functionalistic paradigm in selecting a particular approach to change?

The insights provided by this dissertation show that there is a correlation between the place of an actor within the hierarchy and a need for control and planned change. People higher up in an organisation tend to have a more positive perspective when it comes to the change process than people lower down in the organisation, and they are often convinced that they leave room for interaction and differences of opinion. The lower the position of an actor in the organisation, the more moderate or negative their perspective on change management is likely to be, the less likely they are to be involved in the process, and the less interactive they will perceive change strategies to be. The results of this study suggest that change strategy is the combined outcome of assumptions, convictions, context and interaction patterns. There is a discrepancy between *espoused theories* and *theories in use*. Change managers communicate and interact with other people and the consequences of their actions become clear in that interaction. In these interaction processes they create certain convictions and standard ways to behave and interact, which become habitual and influence the way they interact with others.

The case studies showed 23 fixated convictions among actors in change processes. Many of these convictions reflect positional thinking and systematic and planned approaches to change. When people are set in their convictions, it influences the way they think and act, which will result in circular interaction patterns. This study identified ten circular interaction patterns among actors involved in change processes:

1. *Persevering*: this pattern is characterized by perseverance among top managers in choosing a topdown implementation of change plans. They do so because they are

convinced that their employees have a negative attitude and are incapable, because they fear they may lose face, and because they are convinced that their employees need powerful leadership. This approach from management reinforces the negative attitude among the employees, which management sees as a confirmation of what they thought all along, and which reinforces their belief that what is needed is a strong top-down approach.

2. *Creating mutual dependencies*: this pattern is characterized by a paradoxical relationship between striving for autonomy and self-organisation, on the one hand, and a need for control and planned change on the other. In this interaction pattern, a dependable attitude among employees causes managers to study the possibilities for self-organisation. Managers, however, interpret the behaviour of their employees as immature, which persuades them that a firm hand is what is needed to control the employees. The paradox here is that it is the managers themselves who create the dependent attitude they so dearly want to alter. Employees in turn ask to be guided and managed, thus evoking the response from their managers. This pattern is both the cause and the effect of this process.
3. *Avoiding criticism*: in this pattern managers do not involve employees in change processes and avoid interaction with employees for fear of empowering them. What is paradoxical about this pattern is that avoiding criticism evokes criticism rather than discouraging it. Decisions that affect the working conditions of employees are made without consultation. Because interaction is avoided and the employees are not given the opportunity to give their opinion, the decisions have negative impact. The decision to avoid any interaction evokes more criticism, which in turn causes managers to avoid criticism more, et cetera.
4. *Using information and persuasion to fight insecurity*: what is paradoxical in this pattern is that informing employees about change processes and persuading them of the necessity of change as a means to fight obscurity, rumours and insecurity, at the same time evokes obscurity, rumours and insecurity. This results in a lack of confidence in management, and isolation of top management, which in turn leads to an increased need for control, more information and regulations for a desired future, resulting in more obscurity, further isolation, et cetera.
5. *Hindering problem solving by centralizing*: an unwritten rule in this pattern is that the solution to any problem employees encounter needs to be approved by top management. Line managers are expected to communicate all problems and questions to the top. People from other departments who are in a position to help solve the problems are not asked to take part in the problem-solving process. Top managers are too occupied with all kinds of different questions and do not have the time nor the attention needed to take action. Problems are placed on hold and their solution is delayed. Employees signal that barriers to the process are not solved. Any suggestion on their part as to how a problem may be solved is brushed aside by middle managers based on the assumption that top management is responsible for solving the problems. Problems persist and are once more communicated to the top, after which the cycle repeats itself. The worst case scenario is that people fail to generate solutions, employees become demotivated and are convinced that it is all pointless anyway. They stop suggesting solutions and no longer make a serious attempt to change the pattern seriously.
6. *Being unable to generate enough time and capacity*: due to a lack of insight into

change plans, it is difficult to convince top management, technostructure and support staff to provide the time, capacity and help needed to make the change process a success. As a result, people involved in the change process spend many hours trying to drum up support from top management and the support staff, time they ought to spend working on the change process. With too little time and too much to do they become demotivated and their faith in the change process diminishes. Change management responds to this with a firm hand, which leads to even greater demotivation. When top management is told about it, it will be even less inclined to support the process and a negative spiral develops.

7. *Formalising*: a reorganisation of structure, teams, new job specifications, and business processes leads to a situation where there is uncertainty about responsibilities, processes and management. The people involved are inclined to point to others as the cause of the problems. Solidarity vanishes, an island structure develops and people ask for more and better steering and management, which results in more and new directions and regulations, more paperwork, more bureaucracy, an increasing work pressure and greater uncertainty.
8. *Balancing between steering and letting go*: when people who are working on a change process do not interact with fellow employees elsewhere in the organisation who they need to turn the change into a success, these fellow employees will not share their enthusiasm. Their scepticism may lead to a more interactive approach. However, the fellow employees will tend to wait and see what happens. When the interactive approach fails to produce immediate results, change management will fall back on the original firmer approach, which will reinforce existing scepticism among other employees. Change managers realise that their actions are not helping, and find a new method in trying to coach employees. However, since this kind of coaching is actually a way of managing people, their level of participation in the change process remains a limited one. As a result, their commitment diminishes and a successful realisation of the change process becomes even more difficult. Change managers repeatedly try to switch between an interactive and a firmer approach, which leaves the employees deeply puzzled about what is going on.
9. *Realising self-management using a steering approach*: in this pattern, change managers undermine their own efforts to promote self-management by continually putting self-management up for debate and relapsing into steering from a need to stay in control. There are several assumptions underlying this pattern: self-organisation will result in chaos, employees are insufficiently capable of self-organising successfully, the changes are too abstract for employees to understand and a top-down approach does not bother employees. The result of all this is that change managers choose powerful steering as a way to promote self-management, and keep relapsing into a top-down approach. Employees in turn lose confidence in change management and stop being interested in contributing to the changes and lose faith in the goals of the process. This persuades change managers that their original assumptions were right and that the top-down approach is the correct one.
10. *Avoiding interaction*: in this pattern, top managers ask middle managers and employees for feedback and their opinion on the change process, claiming they strive for interaction. In doing this, they give middle managers and employees the impression that they can contribute to changes. When their request is answered, the top managers become afraid to handle too many or even conflicting opinions,

and they revert to making the decisions themselves and fall back into their original top-down approach. This in turn evokes a negative response on the part of the employees and middle managers. They stop contributing. Communication between the top and the rest of the organisation falters, leaving top management isolated. When top managers respond to the unwelcome situation by renewing their offer for interaction, the pattern repeats itself, and may even repeat itself until employees no longer believe in the usefulness of contributing.

Different patterns can exist in an organisation simultaneously. They appear to correlate with patterns of configurations, context characteristics and choices of change managers in favour of a specific change approach. In sceptical organisations, for instance, the organisational characteristics often emphasize order and formalisation, which is expressed in the systematic approach to change that is dominant in this configuration.

Identifying and handling complex problems in change processes

This dissertation shows that changing Dutch organisations have a tendency to adopt a classical attitude to organising and changing. It is an attitude that is based on a hierarchical perspective, subject-object thinking and an episodic approach to change in which change is seen as an intentional and infrequent entity that can be implemented. The question is how feedback and interaction can contribute to changing the interaction patterns and the underlying dominant logic. The methodological objectives of this dissertation were to investigate the usefulness of survey feedback in stagnating change processes, and the applicability of reflective action research and reflective learning in change processes. Survey feedback is a research method in which insights from questionnaires are fed back to and discussed with people within organisations, and people together generate solutions for problems. Reflective action research is a repeated process by which methods are tested, the process is evaluated and new methods are chosen. My experiences with survey feedback in this dissertation have been:

1. When survey feedback is used as a management tool, the perspective of people higher up in the hierarchy remains the dominant perspective. It is hard to stimulate people to reflect on thinking and practice and to search for action alternatives.
2. An alternative for feedback as a management tool is survey feedback as a means to stimulate learning. From this perspective, survey results are used to stimulate conversations about problems. These conversations are organised in the line and researchers act as facilitators in the process. The approach can encourage people to reflect on their processes of thinking and acting. Survey feedback as a way to stimulate learning only works, however, when the change agent is open to it.

Despite the possibilities that survey feedback can offer as a means to stimulate learning, it does not always contribute to reflection and learning. It is my experience that survey feedback as a way to stimulate reflection and learning is difficult to realise in the following situations:

1. Feedback in the line is difficult when the problems in the organisation have to do with the existing approach to steering and management.
2. Interaction is limited to conversations *within* work systems where people are working closely together.

3. The extent to which middle managers are held responsible for solving the problems is too high.
4. Middle managers and researchers occupy positions as intermediaries, which hinders interactions between top managers and employees.
5. Possibilities for mutual feedback on thinking and acting by actors from different work systems are insufficient.

An *interactive* approach to survey feedback is possible when all actors involved are open to such an approach and are prepared to invest time and energy. In this research, interactive approaches were most successful in the following situations:

1. No strict hierarchy and status differences in the research group.
2. A research group representing perspectives of all work systems or problem owners involved in the process.
3. The problems are studied from multiple perspectives.
4. The research group keeps in contact with all actors involved.
5. Actors involved work with examples from their everyday practice and generalise their insights from these examples.
6. Actors involved make visible how everyone's interference contributes to problems by making causality visible.
7. An ongoing exchange of perspectives is stimulated.
8. Discussions with all stakeholders involved are organised, in which the conditions mentioned above are met.

Discussing survey findings as a way to bring about interaction between the various stakeholders involved in a change process can contribute to successful change, if and when it contributes to organisational learning and reflection on the change approaches. Moreover, survey feedback can help people transcend their fixed assumptions or convictions and thus change circular interaction patterns. To do so, a context needs to be created in which interaction is made possible and people start reflecting on what they believe to be true and begin learning from fixated convictions. Survey feedback as an intervention method contributed to interaction, reflection and learning in various ways:

1. Differences in perspective are made visible, which contributes to visibility of different worldviews of actors from different work systems.
2. Ongoing interaction is facilitated, because actors from different work systems are brought together, give meaning to differences in perspective and discuss action alternatives together.
3. An interactive approach to survey feedback underlines the importance of involving all stakeholders into the research process. That way, none of the actors is excluded.
4. Interactive survey feedback contributes to the development of a shared language because ongoing interaction between actors from different configurations is facilitated.
5. By making the context of change and the relationships between groups of actors visible, different perspectives on the problems are brought out and exchanged.
6. In an interactive approach to survey feedback, actor groups with conflicting opinions keep talking to each other despite their differences. Fixations and conflicts can be prevented or discussed constructively.

7. Sharing perspectives and discussing problems in change processes using survey results can help people reflect on their own and each other's actions, provided they are open to this.
8. Survey feedback can be used as a method look beyond fixed beliefs by discussing interaction patterns, current convictions and paradigms.
9. In my experience, the reflective action researcher can function as a third actor who brings in different perspectives or explanations. In doing this, he or she can help people reflect on their fixed beliefs and explore better ways to work together.

In my experience, however, an interactive approach to survey feedback does not work equally well in all contexts. I found that there are certain context characteristics that contribute to a more interactive form of feedback, reflective active research and learning:

1. Openness and trust between members of a research group.
2. Openness and trust between the members of an organisation and those of a research group.
3. Ongoing interaction between organisation members and members of a research group.
4. Shared problem definition and search for a new future.
5. Room to doubt one's own actions.
6. A willingness to discuss problems and doubts.
7. Overcoming fear to reveal thoughts and interpretations.
8. A willingness to receive and accept feedback and working on it.
9. Shared desire for change.
10. Interaction patterns that offer space to talk to each other.
11. Reflecting in the process of interacting and acting.

It is difficult to promote interaction in organisations where management is not open to the exchange of perspectives. Some habitual circular interaction patterns call for in-depth methods of analysis and intervention. Circular interaction patterns depicted in causal loops can be used as a powerful intervention method when survey feedback alone does not suffice. Feedback of circular interaction patterns can serve as a method for *reframing*, because it mirrors the actions of actors in change processes. *Reframing* is a short intervention aimed at changing images of reality by encouraging actors to look at a problem from a different angle. It may help clarify the relationships between fixed beliefs and group actions on the one hand, and stagnated interaction processes on the other. However, it is our experience that:

1. Feedback of circular interaction patterns can be seen as an expert intervention approach and as a management tool.
2. The danger in such an approach is that actors do not recognize the pattern, claim not to recognize it and reject the insights.
3. An interactive way of discovering interaction patterns may provide more results than non-interactive forms.

Concluding, difficulties in change processes can be better understood by looking at the various aspects of organisation and change in specific contexts, and by paying attention to the differences in perspectives, assumptions and interaction patterns between

people in the organisation. A combination of insights from organisation science, change management and change process literature as well as social interpretive literature can help us gain a better understanding of the difficulties that occur in change processes. Barriers to change have to do with the dominance of a functionalistic paradigm, a need for control and the assumption that change is something that can be planned and implemented.

Case studies show a high change potential among people lower down the hierarchy. The most successful attempts to change are initiated by employees and middle managers, the people who know and understand the problems they come across in their day-to-day work. They are focused on solving practical problems and developing new work methods. However, top managers need to reflect on, understand and learn about change processes. Differences between the *espoused theory* and the *theory in use* of top managers suggest that reflective learning may not be easy. Research and intervention methods that focus on reflection and learning, for instance reflective action research, survey feedback as an interactive approach, and feedback of circular interaction patterns, may help accomplish reflective learning by stimulating interaction and exchange of perspectives.