

# Seeing the ways organisations change

## KINDS OF CHANGE



EMERGENT CHANGE



TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE



PROJECTABLE CHANGE

Living systems are constantly changing. Healthy change is what we need and seek and so we usually ask: “How do we change our organisation?” But it might be helpful to take a step back and first ask “How do organisations tend to change, how is this organisation already changing, whether visibly or not, and what conditions and possibilities for change exist?” Knowing how an organisation is changing, and what are its conditions of change, and embedding our work in those change processes already underway, is key to a developmental approach.

There are three major types of social change that we have observed that also apply to organisations.

### EMERGENT CHANGE

Emergent change describes the day-to-day unfolding of life, where individuals, families, communities, organisations and societies change gradually and unconsciously, learning from experience, trial and error, trying to improve and enhance what they know and do, building on what is there, step-by-step, uncertainly, but still learning and adapting, however well or badly. It is change characterised by *action learning*.

### TRANSFORMATIVE CHANGE

Organisations also get stuck or caught in crisis. When growth and complexity outstrip organisational capacity, when important needs are no longer being met, the organisation becomes unstable or out of balance and all sorts of unusual behaviours are let loose. The symptoms of this kind of change often show themselves in interpersonal conflict or more general organisational tension, growing towards crisis. Tension, conflict and power struggles are commonly experienced as negative and we try to avoid them. Yet situations of stuckness or crisis are often opportunities for significant, transformative change.

This kind of change happens mostly through difficult processes of *unlearning* the deeper attitudes, approaches, beliefs and values underlying the crisis and facing our fears, doubts and hatreds. Unlearning clears the way so that new, more appropriate foundations can be renewed or adopted.

### PROJECTABLE CHANGE

When organisations are reasonably stable and healthy and when external conditions are not too unpredictable, then the conditions for projectable change exist. In such conditions people can often look far ahead, creating visions of what they want and making plans towards making them happen. Hence “Projects”.