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ABSTRACT   *Questionnaire data collected from 71 management consultants is used to gain insight into their preferences and assumptions regarding organizational change. The main question is: 'how do management consultants think about change and which preference do they have regarding the use of intervention methods?'. The research is based on a framework in which five perspectives on change are conceptualized and in which each perspective is divided in thinking and doing and as a whole is associated with a colour. These perspectives are: yellow-print thinking which is based on processes of power, coalition formation and coercion; blue-print thinking is synonym with planned and programmed change; red-print thinking concerns Human Resource Management; green-print thinking lines up with organizational learning; and white-print thinking stands for emergent processes of self steering, chaos and sense making. The results suggest that the method used produces useful insight in consultants' attitudes and preferences.*

KEY WORDS: Organizational change, management consultants, change orientations

Introduction

The everyday work of individual management consultants is not merely about implementing ready-made methods and technologies. It has been argued that consultancy work is an ongoing effort of convincing the client about one's usefulness

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and contribution (Clark and Salaman, 1996; Sturdy, 1997; Berglund and Werr, 2000; Meriläinen *et al.*, 2004). In this regard, social skills are of the utmost importance and personal character and personal preferences seem to be an integral part of a consultant's professional competence (Legge, 2002). In spite of this, Tichy (1974, p. 164) believes that the consultant's approaches to realizing change are based on implicit ideas rather than a set of clearly formulated principles. What are the foundations of the consultant's success in legitimating their actions, what is the rhetorical space of possible arguments available to them in legitimating their activities, and what is the role of their own preferences in this? Answering these questions requires knowledge of these implicit ideas, so a questionnaire was set out management consultants to discover their implicit ideas about what works in their opinion, which intervention style they prefer and the intervention methods they most often use.

In most management consultant books – see, for example, Block (2000) and Kubr (2002) – the prevailing opinion is that a management consultant acts through one's own preferences and tends towards congruence in one's personal preference and one's way of working. The few scientific publications on this subject seems to concentrate on the question of to what extent a management consultant is influenced in one's way of working by one's own personal preference or by requirements from the situation or context (Tichy and Hornstein, 1972; Tichy, 1974; Werr, Stjernberg and Docherty, 1997). An interview study in five large management consulting companies Werr *et al.* (1997, p. 288) concludes that the personal preferences of management consultants define the intervention methods that they apply. This seems contradictory to what is stated by Beer and Walton (1987, p. 363), who suggest a more contingency-based approach in which the methods of management consultants depend upon a variety of situational factors, like the type of change problem and the possibilities within a client organization. This stance is also supported by empirical evidence. Based on a sample of 91 management consultants, Tichy (1974) concludes that there are several inconsistencies between personal preferences in the thinking and the doing (acting) of management consultants in change processes. One of the explanations for his findings is that management consultants are not self-conscious about their personal preferences. Moreover, Tichy suggests that change agents are probably not aware of any incongruence in either the value or cognitive dimensions and that one of the factors that allows incongruence to persist is undoubtedly ignorance itself.

Regarding the main question, we first describe the five perspectives on change as conceptualized by De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003). This meta-theoretical concept – the *colours* – was developed in the last seven years and has been extensively applied in both in management education and management practice in the Netherlands. More recently, it is being applied in English-speaking arenas (Van der Sluijs, De Caluwé and Van Nistelrooij, 2006). In their own words, it has proven to be both robust and versatile (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004, p. 10). The choice of colours in this research is because of the need for some type of shorthand that would not emphasize any specific order. After presenting the five change perspectives, we will present a conceptual research model and operationalize some assumptions derived from the original theory. Then we will describe the applied method. The article concludes with a discussion based on the most remarkable research findings and some explanations.

Five Perspectives on Realizing Change

The data is analyzed and organized based on the five perspectives on realizing change as conceptualized by De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003).

Change From a Socio-political Point of View: Yellow-print Thinking

Yellow-print thinking is based on socio-political concepts about organizations in which interests, conflicts and power play an important role (Bacharach and Lawler, 1980). This way of looking at realizing change assumes that people will change when you take into account their interests or when you can compel them to accept certain ideas (Pettigrew, 1975, p. 205; Greiner and Schein, 1988). Combining ideas or points of view and forming coalitions of power blocks are favoured methods in this type of change process. Change is seen as a negotiation exercise aimed at feasible solutions. Management consultants with a typical yellow-print perspective believe that getting everyone on the same wavelength is a change in itself (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004, p. 11). The foremost consideration of the yellow-print change agent is to always bear in mind the conglomeration of interests, parties, and players and to strive for agreements and policies. Examples of interventions that are believed to resemble this perspective are confrontation meetings, strategic alliances and inter-group conflict resolution (Cummings and Worley, 2004).

Change From a Blue-print Point of View: Blue-print Thinking

Blue-print thinking is based on the rational design and implementation of change (Hammer and Champy, 1993), and project management and strategic management are some of its strongest tools. In blue-print thinking, it is assumed that people or things will change if a clearly specified result is laid down beforehand. Controlling the change by managing, planning and monitoring the process is considered feasible (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004, p. 11). Management consultants who believe in this line of thinking see change as something you can control and realize by a rational process that starts with – define and design – and that is aimed at the best possible solution. Management consultants with a typical blue-print perspective see themselves as experts in the content of the change effort. Result orientation, decisiveness, accuracy and dedication are necessary attributes for such a change agent (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004:12). Some examples that are believed to resemble the blue-print perspective are Business Process Redesign, Total Quality Management, project management and auditing (Cummings and Worley, 2004).

Change From a HRM Point of View: Red-print Thinking

Human Resource Management has its roots in the classic Hawthorne experiments and is developed further by social-scientists such as McGregor (1960). Change in this way of thinking equates with people changing their behaviour (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2003). This approach to change is accomplished by stimulating people

and by making it appealing to adjust their behaviour. A key concept is barter: the organization hands out rewards and facilities in exchange for personnel taking on responsibilities and trying their best (Zaltman and Duncan, 1997). Management consultants with a typical red-print perspective strive to develop competencies and make the most of people's talents. They are good at motivating people and at devising systems and procedures that facilitate the change. Carefulness, steadfastness and loyalty are relevant attributes of the change agent (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004, p. 12). The foremost consideration is that people make change happen if guided in the right direction. The aim is a good 'fit' between what individuals want and what the organization needs. Examples of interventions are competency management, culture change, goal setting techniques and social activities (Cummings and Worley, 2004).

Change From a Learning Point of View: Green-print Thinking

Green-print thinking has its roots in action-learning theories (e.g., Kolb, Rubbin and Osland, 1991). It has been expanded in more recent thinking on organizational learning (e.g. Senge, 1990). Changing and learning are conceptually closely linked (Van der Sluijs *et al.*, 2006). The main assumption is that people change when they learn. Management consultants with a typical green-print perspective are concerned with allowing and supporting people to take ownership of their learning. They are active in giving feedback and in creating a safe environment in which people have the opportunity to experiment with new behaviour. Examples of green interventions are gaming, survey-feedback, coaching and action learning (Cummings and Worley, 2004).

Change From a Self-organization Point of View: White-print Thinking

According to De Caluwé and Vermaak (2004, p. 13) white-print thinking is nourished by chaos thinking, network theory and complexity theory, all of which are based on living and complex social systems with limited predictability (e.g., Prigonine and Stengers, 1986). Change is seen as a perpetual mobile and as an autonomous self-driving that comes from people's own energy and sense making. It refers to self-organization and 'emergent' processes in which certain patterns are interpreted in a different way or in which different labels and realities are created (Weick and Quinn, 1999, p. 380). Different actors exchange meanings and give sense by ways of direct participation, common ground and dialogue (Sminia and Van Nistelrooij, 2006). Management consultants with a typical white-print perspective try to understand where opportunities lie and search for the seeds of renewal and creativity. Sense-making plays an important role in this, as does the removing of obstacles (De Caluwé and Vermaak, 2004, p. 14). The foremost consideration of the white-print management consultant is to observe what is making things happen and change, supply meanings and perspectives, remove obstacles, get initiatives and explorations going, and empower people while giving sufficient free rein. Examples of white interventions are self-steering processes, search conferences, open space and appreciative inquiry (Barrett, Thomas and Hocevar, 1995).

Conceptual Framework and Some Assumptions

The five perspectives of De Caluwe and Vermaak are represented in each of the three variables illustrated in Figure 1.

The thinking and doing of the management consultant is operationalized in this study by means of three variables: vision, style and intervention. Vision represents the thinking, and style (behaviour) and interventions (method) both represent the doing. The conceptual framework allows us to identify preferences in the thinking and doing of a management consultant: what is the dominant vision, what is the dominant style of intervening and which intervention is most often used. Besides researching the five perspectives, we tested some assumptions that were originally conceptualized by De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003).

The first assumption in the original model is the *dominance of one perspective*. Because of the fact that the starting point of each of the perspectives is so different, De Caluwé and Vermaak (2003, p. 60) assume that management consultants will 'have a combination of perspectives, but that one perspective will be dominant'. The authors do not operationalize this assumption. For this study, we operationalized perspective-dominance as follows: if 25% of the total score is represented by one perspective, this refers to perspective-dominance. We used this figure in the case of scores on five perspectives. If a person scores only on four perspectives, we used a 30% limit. This definition leaves the possibility that several dominant perspectives exist in one person and can be combined.

The second assumption, which is tested in this research, is *perspective-congruence*. A management consultant seems to gain credibility if his ways of thinking and doing are congruent. De Caluwé and Vermaak (*ibid*., p. 123) assume that 'effective strategies must be based on the dominance of one perspective: the basic perspective'. Although they say that there can be a difference between thinking and doing as a management consultant, they assume that this is not desirable and that the difference must be as small as possible. For this study, we operationalized this as follows: there is congruence in perspective when a management consultant scores highest on the same perspective for the three variables: vision, style and intervention.

The third and last assumption is the use of *combinations of the various perspectives*. De Caluwé and Vermaak (*ibid*., p. 272) assume that combinations of perspectives are possible and that consultants will have one or two dominant
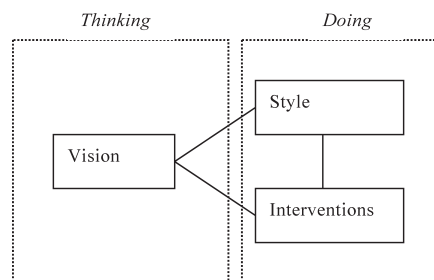

Figure 1. Conceptual framework for organizing management consultant data

perspectives. But they also say that 'a random mix is a certain prediction of failure' (*ibid*., p. 60). We expect that some combinations will occur more often than others because of the conflicting starting points.

Method

The participants in this study all work for management consultancy firms with clients in both profit and non-profit sectors. The questionnaire was distributed amongst 135 management consultants in the period between September 2001 and March 2002. The majority was approached by mail. The selection of the people was done through the Internet: from seven different firms (more and less known, and different sizes), individuals were chosen in a random way. Besides that, the questionnaire was distributed amongst two groups of consultants who participated in the Post-Doctoral Course Management Consultancy of the Free University in Amsterdam. In total, 71 consultants participated (69% male and 31% female), with an average age of 38 years and an average length of experience as consultant of nine years. Sixty-nine percent of them worked for a consultancy firm with more than 20 consultants, 22.5% for a firm with between five and 20 consultants and 8.5% for a firm with fewer than five consultants. The response percentage was 53%.

In the questionnaire, some questions were asked about background data, like gender, age, amount of experience as a consultant and size of the firm. The following 40 intervention methods were mentioned (see Figure 2):

The respondents were asked to report in each quadrant which of these interventions they mostly used. After this, 34 propositions were listed. The respondents were asked to relate each of these to their own way of thinking about change. The answer possibilities ranged from 1 (fully disagree) to 4 (fully agree). Finally they were asked to respond to 20 propositions, in which behavioural and attitudinal aspects were listed. The answer possibilities here also ranged from 1 (fully disagree) to 4 (fully agree).

The distribution of age, gender, experience and size of the firm is in accordance with data from the branch and other research (Visscher, 2001). The questionnaire was developed specially for this study and applied here for the first time.

Results

Despite the methodological rule of thumb – that one needs four or five times as many respondents as the amount of variables to get a reliable solution for a factor analysis – we applied a factor analysis here because of the exploratory character of the study. The study is aimed at getting a first impression and we might adjust the questionnaire based on the results. With the help of a principal components analysis, we reduced the amount of items and we scored the reliability (Cronbach's alpha, see Table 1).

For vision based on a self-organizing perspective and a style based on the HRM perspective, we did not find separate factors. That means that vision and style are both characterized by four colours in the analyses to come. With regard to

1.	Third-party intervention	1.	Confrontation meetings
2.	Implementing new decision rules	2.	Strategic Management
3.	Giving attention to social activities	3.	Designing and implementing team roles
4.	Gaming	4.	Implementing competence management
5.	Implementing self-managed work teams	5.	Culture change
6.	Improving quality of work life (QWL)	6.	Open systems planning
7.	Training and development	7.	Socialtechnical system redesign (STS)
8.	None of the above	8.	None of the above

1.	Implementing balance score card	1.	Strategic alliances
2.	Auditing	2.	Working in projects
3.	Parallel learning structures	3.	Stress management
4.	Open space meetings	4.	Mentoring and coaching
5.	Goal setting	5.	Intergroup relation interventions
6.	Business process redesign (BPR)	6.	Designing and implementing quality circles
7.	Intervision	7.	Microcosm group
8.	None of the above	8.	None of the above

1.	Downsizing
2.	Upgrading mobility and diversity
3.	Team building
4.	Total quality management
5.	Search conferences
6.	Organizational learning
7.	Appreciative inquiry
8.	None of the above

Figure 2. Overview interventions

interventions, five factors are found. On this basis, we calculated for each variable an average score per perspective.

Perspective Dominance

The respondents relate more positively to the propositions that represent the learning perspective (M = 2.92) compared to the other perspectives (M < 2.48) regarding change vision.

With respect to style, the power perspective as well as the learning perspective are most popular (M = 3.06 and M = 3.07). The blue-print perspective is most popular in the respondents' interventions (M = .41), but is closely followed by the Human Resource Management perspective (M = .39). The averages give no reason to assume there is a preference for one specific perspective on the level of this population.

Table 1. Number of items and reliability score for each perspective per variable

	Vision		Style		Intervention	
Perspectives	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Number of items	Cronbach's α	Number of items	Cronbach's α
Yellow	4[a]	0.6	2	0.4	2	0.6
Blue	5	0.6	2	0.5	5	0.6
Red	3	0.5	/	/	5[a]	0.7
Green	5	0.6	3	0.5	2[a]	0.7
White	/	/	3	0.6	3	0.6

[a] = After removal of an item (57, 11.2 en 10.6)

We also looked at the individual results. The application of the 25% or 30% rule gives the following results in Table 2:

This table shows that 39.4% of the respondents have a dominance of one or more perspectives with regard to vision (thinking). From these 26 respondents, 19 consultants have a dominant vision based on the learning perspective. Style dominance is found for 36.9% (n = 24) of the respondents; many of the consultants have a dominant style based on the power perspective (n = 10). With respect to interventions, dominance was found amongst 67 respondents (98.5%); only one respondent did not have dominance. From these 67 respondents, 29 have blue-print dominance in their intervention preferences. If there is a dominance with more perspectives, it is mostly combined with a vision or style based on the power perspective (by 12 consultants).

Perspective Congruence

With the help of a one-sided correlation analysis we looked at the congruence in thinking and doing of the consultants. Significant positive correlations were found for vision and interventions based on the power perspective ($r = .22$, $p = .00$), vision and style based on the learning perspective ($r = .43$, $p = .00$), and for style and interventions based on the self organizing perspective ($r = .36$, $p = .00$). For the other perspectives, we did not find similar correlations. So, it can be concluded that when the thinking and doing of a consultant can be characterized with the power (yellow), learning (green) or self-organizing (white) perspective, the chances for perspective congruence are greater. Only one respondent showed congruence in all three variables.

Combinations of Perspectives

To get a picture of the combination of perspectives, we used a two-sided correlation analysis for each variable and we looked for coherence between perspectives: which perspectives are combined often, with regard to vision, style and intervention? The result of this analysis is described in Table 3.

This table tells us that some are more often combined than others with regard to each variable. The perspectives based on power and blue-print show a coherence with regard to vision ($r = .32$, $p < .01$) and the perspectives based on blue-print and learning for style ($r = .28$, $p < .02$). For intervention, the perspectives

Table 2. Number of respondents showing perspective dominance

	None	One colour dominance	Several colour dominances
Vision[a]	41 (62.1 %)	25 (37.9 %)	1 (1.5 %)
Style[b]	42 (64.6 %)	23 (35.4 %)	1 (1.5 %)
Intervention[c]	1 (1.5 %)	13 (19.1 %)	54 (79.4 %)

[a] = 5 records (7.0 %)

[b] = 6 records (8.5 %)

[c] = 3 records (4.2 %) are incomplete and excluded

Table 3. Regression coefficients between perspectives for each variable

	Yellow	Blue	Red	Green
Vision				
Yellow	/	.31[a]	.11	−.19
Blue	/	/	.21	−.00
Red	/	/	/	−.02
Style				
White	−.41	.01	/	.08
Yellow	/	.05	/	.073
Blue	/	/	/	.28[a]
Intervention				
White	−.17	−.07	.44[b]	.40[b]
Yellow	/	.48[b]	.02	−.10
Blue	/	/	−.01	−.08
Red	/	/	/	.42[b]

[a] = Correlation significant at .05 level (2-way)
[b] = Correlation significant at .01 level (2-way)

based on power and blue-print correlate ($r = .48$, $p < .00$), the perspectives based on HRM and self-organizing ($r = .44$, $p < .00$), HRM and learning ($r = .42$, $p < .00$) and learning and self-organizing ($r = .40$, $p < .00$). We can conclude that the consultant more often chooses multi-perspective approaches with regard to interventions than with regard to vision or style. With a two-sided correlation analysis, we found in 12 cases significant correlations ($p < .05$) between multi-perspective combinations. This is reproduced in Figure 3.

This figure shows a big gap between the perspectives blue-print (blue) and power (yellow) on the one side and the perspectives HRM (red), learning (green) and self-organizing (white) on the other side. We found a total of 12 significant correlations. Two of them are a positive correlation between the power and blue-print perspective and four positive correlations between the HRM, learning and self-organizing perspectives. We also found five negative correlations that confirm the gap between the power and blue-print perspectives on the one side and HRM, learning and self-organizing perspectives on the other side. Only one positive correlation between vision based on a blue-print perspective and style based on a learning perspective contradicts this. Based on our sample, we conclude that management consultants often make combinations between the HRM (red), learning (green) and self-organizing (white) perspectives, which is also true for the power (yellow) and blue-print perspective.

Discussion

The results indicate a significant incongruence between the management consultants' preference in thinking and the use of interventions. On one hand, the management consultants in our research prefer to see change as processes of learning and self-organization, and on the other hand they use intervention methods that clearly specify the results in advance and which make it easy to
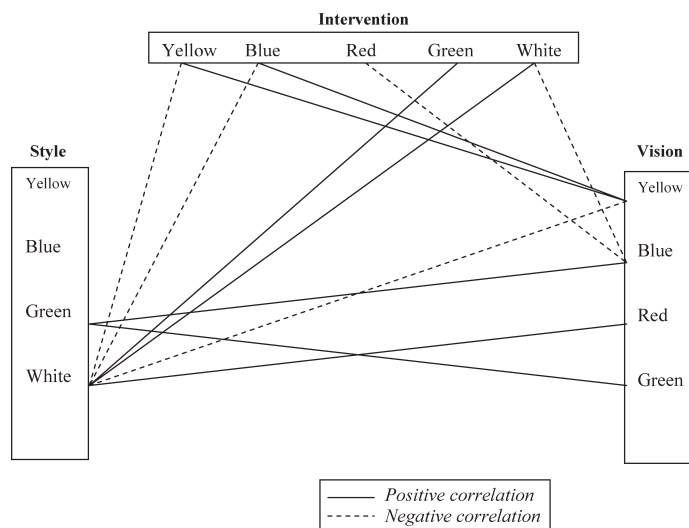
Figure 3. Overview of significant correlations between the variables

plan, control and monitor the change process closely. Furthermore, the participating management consultants in our research seem to work, remarkably, in a complete opposite way as their preferences seem to indicate. In the literature, we found only resembling results in Tichy's (1974) outstanding article. Tichy found incongruences in the value and cognitive orientations of change agents in how planned change is implemented and the role of the change agent in the same process. According to Tichy, one of the factors that allows incongruence to persist is undoubtedly ignorance. According to him, change agents are probably not aware of any incongruence in either the value or cognitive dimensions. Their work, so Tichy (1974, p. 181) argues, does not require explication and systematic focus on their assumptions – 'because of overadvocacy, change agents are not forced into clear articulation'.

As presented in Figure 4, it seems plausible that there are some situational factors in play in choosing the style and intervention method of intervening.

Examples of such situational factors are the preferences in thinking and the set of assumptions managers have about change, success and the culture of their own organization (Beer, 2001, in Sminia and Van Nistelrooij, 2006). By not following their own preference and accepting the preference of the manager in charge, the management consulting seems to fail to convince the client of one's usefulness and contribution (Clark and Salaman, 1996; Sturdy, 1997; Meriläinen *et al.*, 2004). It also raises questions on the remark of Legge (2002) who suggests that personal preferences seems to be an integral part of a consultant's professional competence. The lack of awareness of his own preferences suggests that a management consultant is not clearly aware of his own motives. This is important – as Zaltman and Duncan (1977, p. 194) put it - in that it sensitizes the consultant to his own biases, which may act as moderators in dealing with the client organization. Werr *et al.* (1997) suggest that an intervention method is a framework.
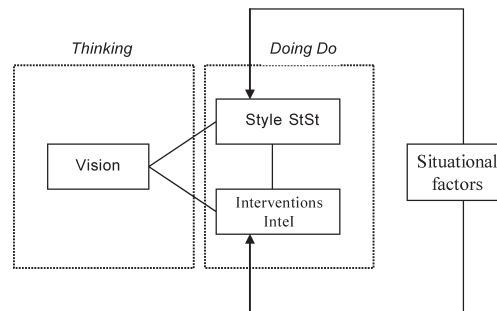
Figure 4. New conceptual framework

Within that framework, the way of working strongly depends upon the preference of the manager, but also upon the type of change problem and the possibilities for change in a certain organization.

Another note that we would like to make is that the results are based upon self-reports of consultants, not on what they really think and do. This is an important limitation of our work and the possibility cannot be denied that the respondents gave socially desirable answers. In spite of this, the dichotomous picture that is reflected in Figure 2 gives the impression that there are some interesting resemblances with another line of research. The preferences of the respondents can largely be divided in two perspectives. On the one hand, a change perspective from which rational, content-oriented and expert-oriented considerations are made, with preferences for a strategic-management-inspired approach of generating change in a top-down fashion. And on the other hand, a change perspective from which social, cultural and process considerations are made, with preferences for an Organization Development-inspired approach of generating change in a bottom-up fashion. Beer (2001) and Sminia and Van Nistelrooij (2006, p. 100) emphasize that both approaches are, because of their complementarities, considered to be insufficient for the successful implementation of large scale change. Moreover, the combination of both perspectives seems to be the most fruitful option, but as our results seems to indicate not by one person.

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