

# Presentation aims

## Input

- Society changes because...
- Organisational change theory.

## Discussion

- How do things change in your organisation (or one you know well)?
- Which of these tensions apply in your situation?



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This slide set is based on a presentation given to people studying on the Postgraduate Certificate in Sustainable Business 2011, run by the Cambridge Programme for Sustainability Leadership [www.cpsl.cam.ac.uk](http://www.cpsl.cam.ac.uk)



These pioneers are paired: the outer ones set the agenda with controversial ideas, the inner ones have become leaders, demonstrating the ideas or capitalising on their acceptance.

Clockwise from top left:

- Olaudah Equiano (slave who bought his freedom, wrote a best-selling autobiography and campaigned for abolition in the UK, 18th century), Barack Obama.
- Johanna Sigurdardottir (prime minister of Iceland, first openly gay national leader), Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (lawyer and civil servant 1825 - 1895), is seen today as the pioneer of modern LGBT rights movement..
- Mohandas Gandhi, Nelson Mandela.
- Mary Wollstonecraft (Author of *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, 1792), Indra Nooyi (PepsiCo CEO).



Some technologies which have changed our world and the way we live in it.

Wheel

Safety matches

Washing machine

Abacus

Telephone



The unplanned ecological side-effects of human activities, which in turn have obliged people to change how they live.

Dust Bowl, US, 1930s.

Easter Island.

Gulley with erosion caused by feral rabbits, Australia.

Aral Sea.



Deliberate and planned examples of a different way of living:

Green Belt Movement tree nursery (Kenya)

Centre for Alternative Technology (Wales)

Growing Communities Farmers Market (London)

Freecycle (UK)

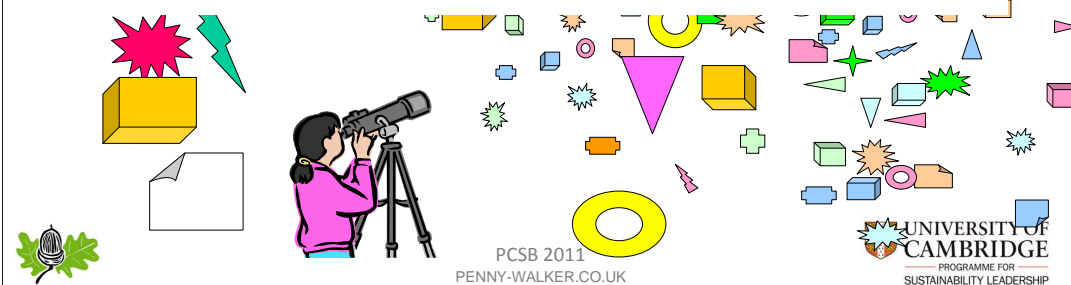


The power of mass - money, strength, power and the crowd:

- Falling of the Berlin Wall - mass semi-spontaneous action by the crowd.
- Soldiers in World War One - massive mobilisation of weapons, cannon fodder and state power.
- McDonalds in China - combination of popular acclaim (no customers = no power), capitalist muscle and permission from a powerful state.
- Paul the Octopus - internet sensation during the World Cup.

Some theory about organisational change

- How does theory help?
  - Exposing assumptions
  - See beneath the surface
  - Highlight contrasts
- Planned and emergent change
- Change for sustainable development



Beginning with some thoughts about how theory might help and some examples of theories.

Going into a bit of detail on the contrast between two different schools of thought about organisational change.

And ending up with some thoughts about what's different about change for sustainable development, from the perspective of the 'change agent' (that's you!).

*Some theory about organisational change*

- How does theory help?
  - Exposing assumptions
  - Your assumptions (theories) about organisational change...

*...what is an organisation?*

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Especially when talking about abstract concepts, we can find ourselves blinkered by our assumptions, and particularly metaphorical ones.

For example, your assumptions about what an organisation is, which has implications for how it might change.

A good way to expose the metaphors which are unwittingly guiding and limiting (blinkering, filtering) our thinking, is to draw...



# What is an organisation?



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So here's an instant way to access your own intuitive theories.

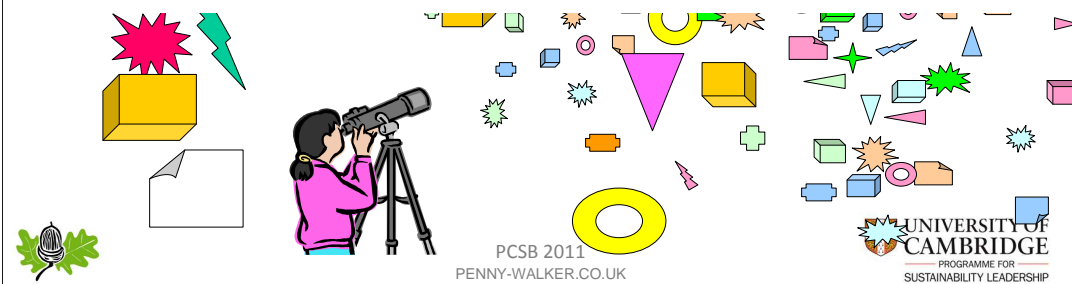
Grab a piece of paper and a pen or pencil.

Draw an organisation.

Debrief. What have people drawn? What assumptions do these visual metaphors bring out?

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So we've exposed some assumptions.

Now let's look beneath the surface.

# What changes, when an organisation changes?



Artifacts - visible, tangible manifestations, observable behaviours

Espoused values - goals, philosophies, vision statements

Basic underlying assumptions - unconscious, taken-for-granted beliefs, mental models

Schein (1988)



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Schein, E. H. 1988 *Organisational Culture and Leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. (Edgar Schein)

It's a bit of a cliché, but like all good clichés there's some useful insight...

What you can see on the surface is only part (and not the biggest part) of the story.

See also Seel, 2002

Process - behaviours, activities

System - procedures (e.g. IT), whole system including feedback loops, leverage points

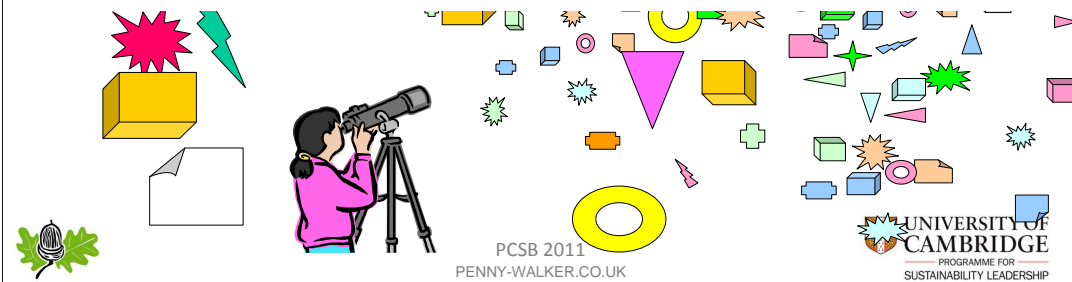
Structure - hierarchy, categories, relationships between 'units', capabilities and functions

Organisation - "*co-creating pattern of relationships*" between people

Seel, R., *The Nature of Organisational Change*, 2002. [www.new-paradigm.co.uk](http://www.new-paradigm.co.uk) (Richard Seel)

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Here are some interesting contrasts in the theory of organisational change.

# Key contrast

Change in response  
to external  
stimulus

*“The only constant  
is change”*



**Emergence**

Organisational agility (reflection,  
observation, learning)

Trust the crowd

? Fatalistic



Change towards a vision

*“Follow the  
Yellow Brick Road”*



**Planned change**

Someone knows the ‘right’ thing  
that the organisation should do / be  
like / achieve.

Expert / senior led.

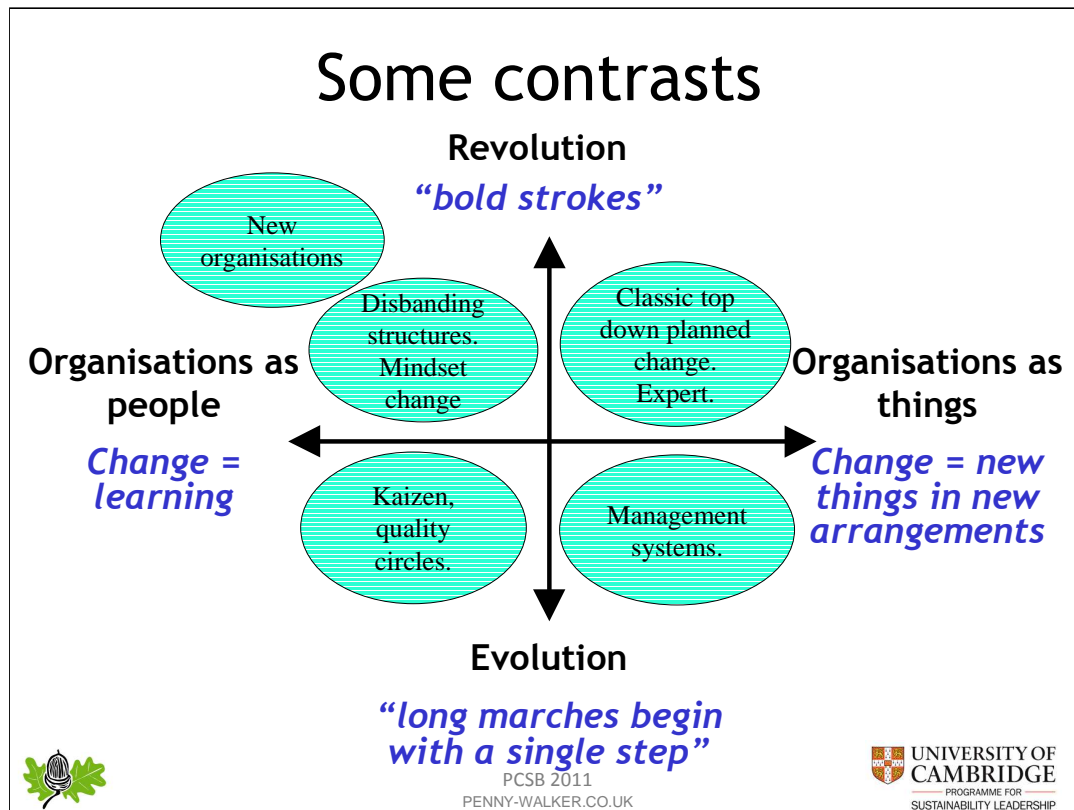
? Superficial and / or inflexible

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Can be a dynamic relationship between these two :

- \* the vision is of an organisation that is agile
- \* to get to the vision successfully the organisation needs to develop agility
- \* what emerges is a clear vision of where the organisation should go.



Here are some other key contrasts in the theory:

- Bold strokes / long marches - from Rosabeth Moss Kanter, and various sources.
- Organisations as things - so change means new things in new arrangements.
- Organisations as collections of people, and their conversations and inter-relationships - so change is learning and different conversations.

If we put those two kinds of contrasts into a 2x2 Boston Matrix, we can map out some typical approaches to organisational change:

- Top down planned change - introduction of new logo and mission statement. Roll out of new IT system.

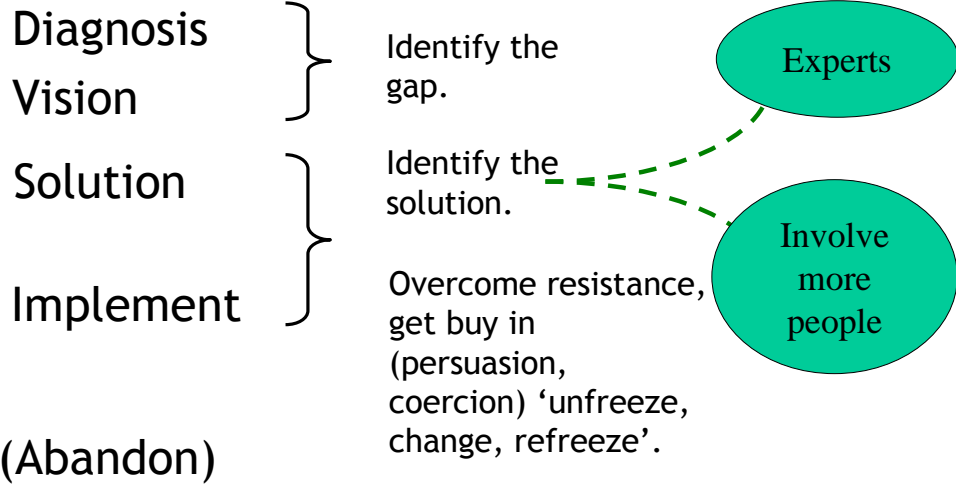
- 
- Management systems - e.g. ISO14001

- 
- Kaizen, quality circles - to improve customer service, or decrease accident rates.

- 
- disbanding - radical flattening of structures.
  - CEO’s inspiring speech, experiential whole-organisation training courses.
  - new organisation - upstart start up with a new way of doing things.

# Planned organisational change

e.g. Schein, Kotter, Lewin



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Remember these theorists may be describing, not advocating.

# Emergence, managed learning

E.g. Schein, Seel, Revans

- Set boundaries.
- Increase connectivity and information flows.
- Expose and question assumptions (diversity of perspectives)
- Watchful anticipation (patience).
- Intention.
- Trust people.



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The trouble with emergence is that you can't force it.

You can put things in place which help it to happen.

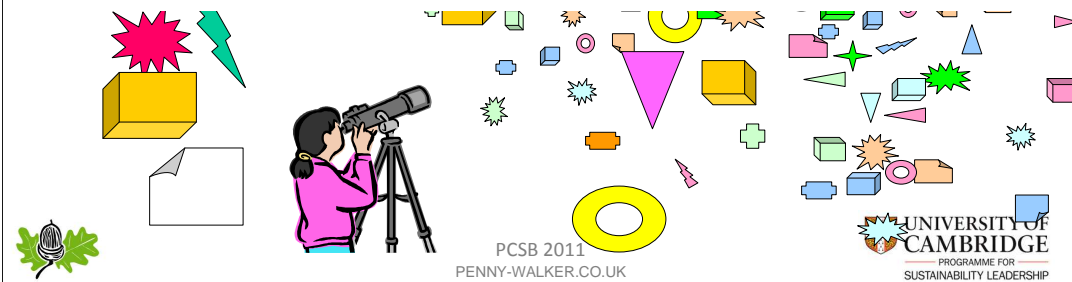
These are the things that need to be in place, for authentic and aware emergence.

See in particular, Engaging Emergence by Peggy Holman.



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Now I'd like to explore the distinctions between planned change and emergent change a bit more.

# Success?

For planned change:

overcoming resistance -  $D \times V \times F > R$

Beckhard and Gleicher

For emergence:

The rate of learning is greater than the rate of change in the external world.

Revans

*“We basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like except that it will be different.”*

Schein



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And what does success look like, in these contrasting models of change?

***Success is overcoming resistance - (Beckhard and Gleicher)***

Three factors must be present for meaningful organisational change to take place. These factors are: **D = Dissatisfaction** with how things are now; **V = Vision** of what is possible; **F = First, concrete steps** that can be taken towards the vision.

If the product of these three factors is greater than **R = Resistance**, then change is possible. Because of the multiplication of D, V and F, if any one is absent or low, then the product will be low and therefore not capable of overcoming the resistance.

***Success is being great at learning*** - fast and flexible

And of course you might want to overcome resistance to the idea of being a reflective, nimble learning organisation, changing your organisation so it becomes ‘change ready’.

What kind of learning is needed? Lots of stuff around on this, e.g.:

- coaching / mentoring / action learning sets
- Senge’s five disciplines
  - systems thinking
  - personal mastery
  - mental models
  - building a shared vision
  - team learning

*“We basically do not know what the world of tomorrow will really be like except that it will be different.”*

Acceptance  
and response

*Fatalistic*

Co-creation  
with intention

*Optimistic*

Alternative attitudes to  
emergence



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This observation - along with witty aphorisms like ‘the only constant is change’ Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 535 BC - 475 BC) - is the basis of the argument that being flexible, having heightened awareness of what’s going on, questioning one’s assumptions and accepted truths, being willing to change, is what’s important for organisations (and people).

There are alternative attitudes to this emergence

- a **fatalistic** / non-attachment to the outcome - whatever happens, happens and I adjust myself to it to achieve whatever counts for me as success. This also covers taking action in anticipation of changes in the context - you spot the signs that a change is likely, and ‘respond’ before it happens.

- an **optimistic** one - intention to participate in co-creating a particular kind of future - closer to the idea of having a vision, but without the aspect of ‘selling’ it to others. Stepping in to intervene in the system with **intention** and **awareness** of the intervention you are making, of the impact you have, and **reflecting** on that.

For example, I might choose to reduce my organisation’s CO2 emissions, as a response to investors’ and customers’ calls for me to do so (a response to the context). In doing so, I make a difference (albeit a small one) to the amount of CO2 emitted, thereby changing the future - I’m co-creating the future context.

# We co-create the world of tomorrow

Where do you want to go?



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If we accept that emergence will take place, and that each of us will play some part in what emerges, then - so this approach says - it is possible to have an intention about what will emerge, put in place the conditions for emergence, and take part in the emergence:

e.g.

Set up a workshop with a safe atmosphere where a diversity of people from inside and outside the organisation take part in a dialogue about the organisation and the world at large.

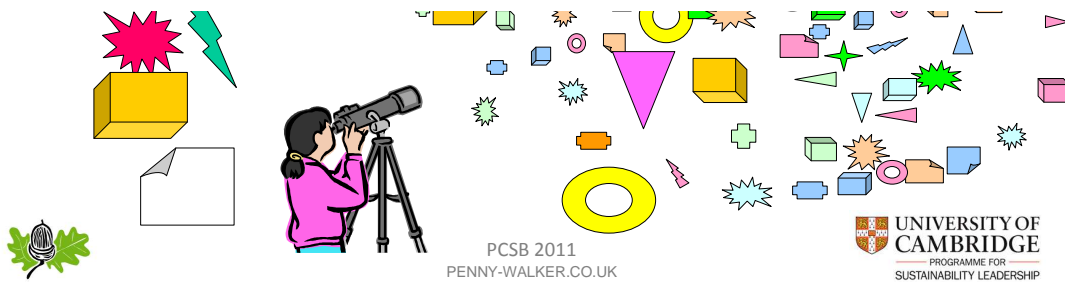
Include some prompts - views on important facts and trends in the world, questions about mission and purpose, invitations to imagine the future.

See what emerges.

For more on this approach, see Holman, P. "Engaging Emergence: Turning Upheaval into Opportunity." Berrett-Koehler, 2010.

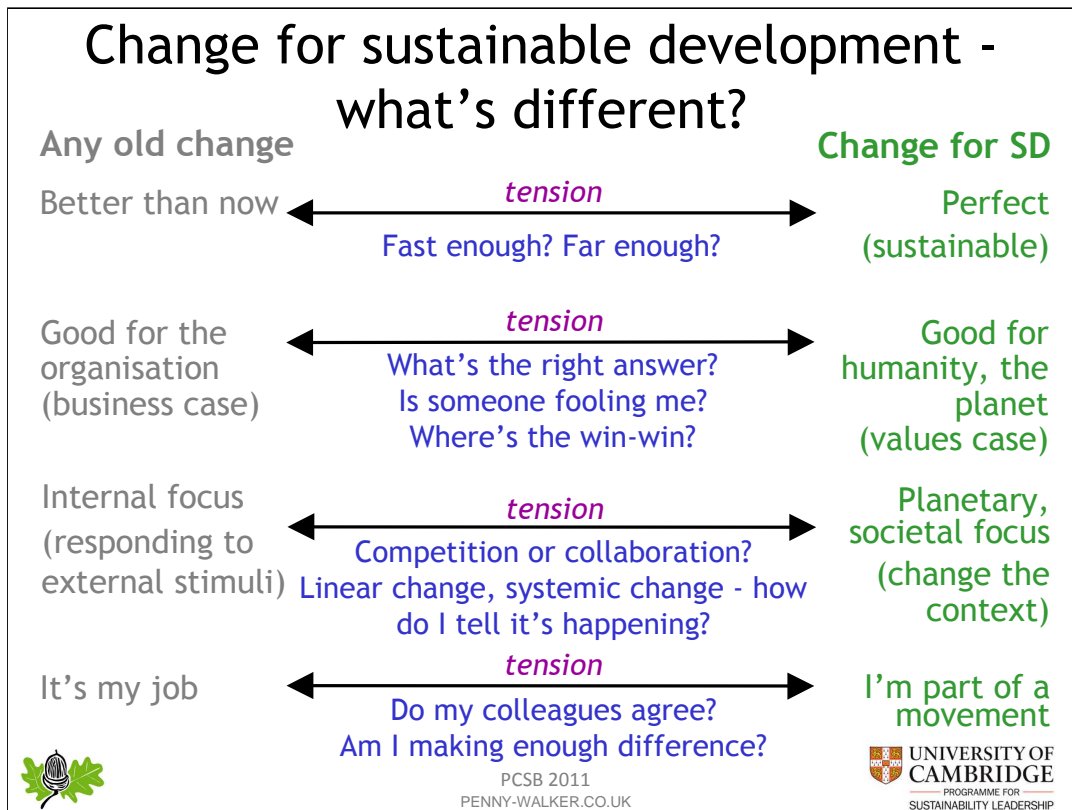
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There are anxieties and tensions present in these ways of thinking about the role of organisations in delivering sustainable development, and the organisational change needed in order for them to be playing that role.

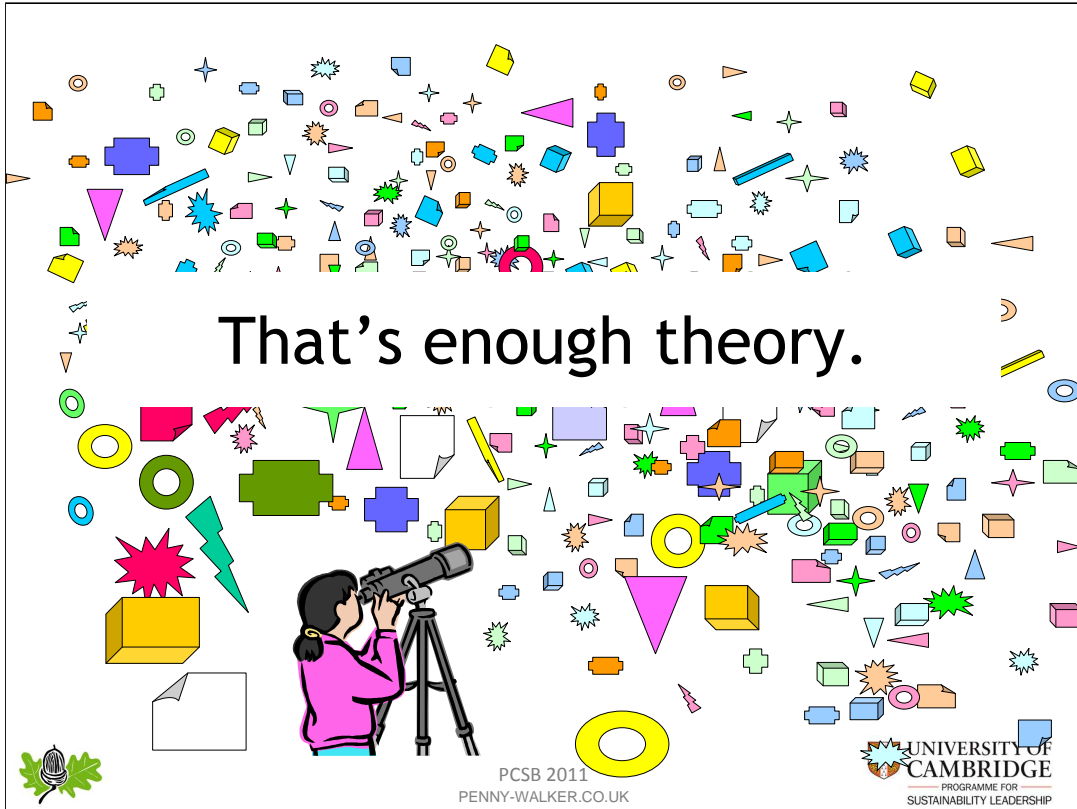
These special aspects of change, when that change is for sustainable development, do not show up in 'ordinary' change management theory.

My own research has explored some of the key tensions which sustainable development change agents inside organisations experience.

For more detail see "Organisational leader or part of a wider change movement? How sustainable development change agents see themselves", a paper presented to the 2008 EABIS Colloquium <http://penny-walker.co.uk/media/2009/09/eabis-08-penny-walker-paper.pdf>

And

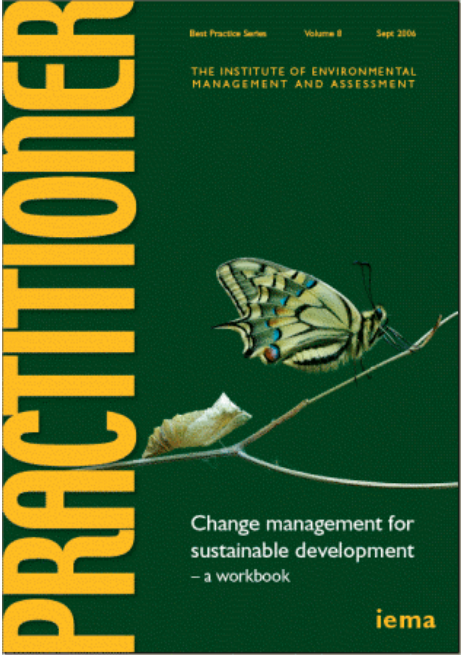
"Supporting the change agents: keeping ourselves effective on the journey of change", in "Consulting for Business Sustainability", Galea C (ed) Greenleaf 2009 [http://penny-walker.co.uk/media/2009/08/gmi54\\_supporting\\_organisational\\_change\\_agents.pdf](http://penny-walker.co.uk/media/2009/08/gmi54_supporting_organisational_change_agents.pdf)



That's enough theory.


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But if you're really keen....

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But if you're really keen to follow it up, this IEMA publication is where I've assembled some of the theoretical insights and frameworks which have proved practically helpful in real companies.

[http://www.iema.net/shop/product\\_info.php?cPath=27\\_29&products\\_id=8455](http://www.iema.net/shop/product_info.php?cPath=27_29&products_id=8455)

There are more articles and papers listed on my website and blog.

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