

HRD Forum: Book Review

Scholarly Practice in Organizational Change

Rick Holden, *Editor, IJHRDPP&R*

**Organizational Change Explained: Case Studies
on Transformational Change in Organizations**
Sarah Coleman and Bob Thomas (Eds.)
Kogan Page, 2017, ISBN: 978-07494-7547-5

Organizational Change Explained shares accounts of practice and insights from experienced change practitioners. Through a series of detailed case studies and related discussion it provides a resource for professionals to reflect upon their own work and consider strategies and approaches to any organizational change issue they may face. Importantly the book is not offering a simplistic checklist of do's and don'ts, but rather the basis for a critical consideration of the learning generated through the analyses presented. The way organizations are approaching change is itself changing. Over the past 15 years, the authors argue:

the conversation about organizational change has evolved from the very basic level (for example, an occasional discrete, local change programme) through to a more mature level (for example, where an organization is managing a portfolio of multiple and often overlapping change initiatives). And now increasingly the change conversation is evolving further into major, complex transformation which is unpredictable, iterative, experimental and often involves high risk.

The book is in two parts. Part 1 uses case material across different industry sectors to look at how change is practically shaped, delivered and embedded. Cases include the UK's NHS, GlaxoSmithKline and what the authors suggest is Europe's largest construction project — Crossrail. One chapter focuses on leading change in the not for profit sector. Importantly, each chapter does not simply describe the organizational change in the context of a particular organization or sector. Rather key themes are integrated into and drawn out from the analysis presented. Whilst the usual suspects — resistance to change, communication and engagement, shared vision etc. — feature strongly, themes that have emerged in more recent years are also given sound attention. So, for example two chapters draw on insights from applied neuroscience — the impact of organizational change on the brain — and relatedly change behaviours. The growing acknowledgement that leadership of change is not all about the executive level also appears in several of the case studies although somewhat disappointingly there is no one chapter that takes this theme as its main focus.

Part 2 uses shorter opinion pieces to understand how change might influence industry sectors and organizations in the future. A highlight is the chapter addressing “the shift from complicated to complex”. Here Heather Bewers reflects that as the operating environment of organizations

becomes increasingly complex (multiple variables, greater unpredictability) rather than just complicated (where multi-variable activities are nonetheless fairly predictable and hence capable of planning and controlling) this traditional approach may itself need to change. Change management, Bowers argues, may need to adopt a more iterative format as options are explored and decisions made to scale up accordingly. Three final chapters address 'futures' in manufacturing, local government and healthcare. However, the discussions tend to follow a pathway of what is, relatively speaking, predictable and plausible and the state of readiness (or lack of) for change. It would have been interesting had they taken a further turn to address the preferable and the creatable.

Whilst the book has a distinctly scholar-practitioner feel to it which is welcome it could be criticized for being insufficiently critically reflective. Where are the stories of organizational change which address and grapple with the the 'dark side' of organizational life? This said, the book is a sound resource; equally well suited to a complete read or being dipped into as necessary. Recognizing the latter, the editors provide a very helpful introductory section which summarizes each chapter, references the cases and sectors involved, and cross references related chapters. The book is a welcome addition to the voluminous literature on organizational change; principally because it provides accessible insight from real, organizationally based case studies and which can be used any professional concerned with change management, to help to inform their thinking about how they might approach and manage change.