JAAP BOONSTRA

Organizational Change as Collaborative Play

A positive view on change and innovation in organizations

"Disruptions in our current world has transformed our businesses from uncertain and ambiguous to unpredictable and paradoxical. In this world systematic and reactive change management models will no longer work. *Change as Collaborative Play offers* a new approach to inspire change in our organizations through the dynamics of a playful relationship between the different agents. A book that will change the way we transform organizations."

SUSANNA SALA – *Viacom International, The Americas; Senior Vice President HR & Communication & Technology*

"In a world of constant business disruptions, this book shines a bright light on how to play with change and embracing change as a positive factor if well-played by different stakeholders. *Change as Collaborative Play* brings back excitement and playfulness instead of paralysis and disruption when confronting change. The ideas and models proposed in the book are very helpful and easy to use, whilst loaded with knowledge and real-life experiences. A must read for any professional at this time and age."

MARCELO AMSTALDEN MÖLLER – *Head of Global Portfolio Strategy, HEINEKEN Group B.V.*

"Change in organizations is mostly seen and experienced as a painful and threatening passage. This book offers us a new and surprising approach: change as play. How can a playful approach make change real and sustainable? *Change as Collaborative Play* offers detailed descriptions of the concept with an abundance of figures and summaries to clarify the complexity we experience in organizational change processes. An attractive book for leaders, managers, students and policy makers."

MARIE-THÉRÈSE CLAES – *Consultant and coach Cross-cultural management; Professor Cross Cultural management, Asian Institute of Technology, Thailand; Professor Global Leadership Louvain School of Management, University of Louvain, Belgium; Former president Society for Intercultural Education, Training and Research (SIETAR Europa)*

"Fundamental change has always existed, especially in organizations. The big difference today is the managerial vertigo provoked by a whirlwind of accelerated changes in the environment and within the organization itself. In *Change as Collaborative Play* professor Jaap Boonstra addresses the topic of constant change in a creative way, looking at the challenge of managing unstable contexts using games as a metaphor. A unique way of diving deep into the managerial challenges of our days and learning about complexity in the most human and simple way: games. Reading is a must."

DR. MARCOS EGUIGUREN – *Executive Director, Global Alliance for Banking on Values; Professor Business Administration, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya; Co-founder SingularNet Consulting*

"In *Change as Collaborative Play*, Jaap Boonstra uses a beautiful and attractive metaphor. Looking at change through the eyes of "play" provides overview, flexibility, optimism, involvement and plurality in all respects. In this book, in-depth knowledge about change processes is shared in a practical and legible way. This makes for a pleasant handbook for leaders, managers, advisors, coaches and students."

YVONNE BURGER – *Independent coach for executive teams; Consultant and supervisory board member for societal organizations; Professor Executive coaching and Dean Center for Executive coaching, VU University Amsterdam*

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In recent years people in organizations have encountered turbulence in the environment in which they operate. Globalization, digitalization, market forces, systemic changes, government measures, regulations and supervisory systems all contribute to dynamics hitherto unknown. This has led to changes in many organizations. The work of the professional is changing. There is more cooperation in networks. The interaction within and among organizations is changing. These changes are not simple as there are contradicting demands from customers and business partners and tensions between stakeholders within and around organizations.

Interactive change occurs in a situation in which people create new realities together and learn to deal with uncertainty. This approach towards change requires the courage to confront an uncertain situation and acknowledge tensions. Then in-depth change and innovation become possible through interaction. This will lead to a fundamental choice: the path of certainty and planned change aimed at stability and control or the path of tension and uncertainty which contributes to in-depth innovation in our organizations and the world around us.

This book contributes to successfully changing and innovating organizations in a dynamic environment. Changes are inevitable but not a matter of course. This book will reveal what dynamics the players in organizations are facing and how they can shape changes without losing themselves in those dynamics. In eleven chapters a play model for organizational change is explained. The play model provides inspiration and guidance for players who are willing to innovate and are constantly exposed to change. Anyone can be a player in change by contributing through their own role and profession, to change and innovation in organizations.

The play model is based on long-term research of change processes in organizations, in a turbulent environment. The model has been successfully applied in management courses and can be used in all kinds of organizations.

In this book, you, together with others, have a set of guidelines for shaping changes in your organization and making them successful.

JAAP BOONSTRA
Amsterdam/Barcelona, May 2019

In change processes, people together give meaning to the situation in which they find themselves, searching for an approach to change that suits them and the situation. Together they play with change and innovation.

CHANGING BY INTERACTION

For organizations in a dynamic environment that want to prepare themselves for the future, play is a suitable metaphor.[1] This metaphor implies that there are players playing together in change and enjoying it. The play metaphor also helps to initiate changes in organizations.[2] Players envisage the future, try to find their way in an uncertain world and make an effort to shape their future. This play metaphor is not about planned change with predefined targets. It is about a collective search process, in which players work together towards organizing, changing and innovating, the play metaphor providing a positive outlook on changing and innovating organizations as a collective process.

For many people in organizations the environment in which they work and live appears to be a turbulent and unpredictable one.[3] This uncertainty becomes manageable in the interplay with other players in network-like settings. Players from various departments and organizations enter an unfamiliar area, exchange their experiences of what is going on in their environment, and explore the possibilities of responding to them. This process of exchange and interpretation requires openness towards each other and an unhampered view of what is going on in the relations between the organization and environment. Organization and environment are not two separate worlds. They influence each other continuously. This ties in with a movement to organize work differently, letting go of existing rules, putting the objective first again and allowing the professionals more space. The play metaphor reveals that change is not the task of the individual, but rather an adaptive quality of many to collectively shape their environment.[4]

The play metaphor invites players to see the informal life of an organization and understand play patterns. It is not only about strategies, structures and systems, but also about what is read between the lines,[5] the unwritten rules of the game,[6] and ingrained play patterns.[7] The play metaphor brings out cultural practices, stubbornness, affects interactions between players, political games and individual uncertainties. With actual in-depth change and innovation these aspects are essential

in making changes successful. The play metaphor allows us to discuss the way of playing, who are the real players, and how much room there is in which to play.

The play metaphor helps to make clear existing play rules and play patterns, adapting them if necessary. Rules in organizations are indispensable in order to produce quality and maintain a certain stability, and if existing rules and ingrained play patterns are the source of problems, it is necessary to bring them up for discussion and change them. Changing play patterns is also necessary in order to be able to respond to unexpected events and to make room for innovation. In this tension between stability and innovation, existing rules and play patterns are questioned. As a result, there will be a situation in which a number of players want to hold on the rules, whereas others will start searching for new rules and patterns. Players who decide that new rules are needed opt for creating space and starting new play, allowing for new rules to develop along the way.[8] In this play people work together, developing new approaches in the process. At any given moment these new approaches automatically become part of new rules and patterns, leading to a flow of constant innovation. The play metaphor triggers recognition of play rules, preserves the strength of existing play and simultaneously searches for new rules and play patterns that may contribute to the future.[9]

The challenge of the play metaphor lies in the combination of playfulness and professionalism.[10] Playfulness is necessary for changing existing rules, breaking through existing play patterns and trying something new. Playfulness without professionalism leads to uncoordinated activities, which may be fun but have little impact. Professionalism is about considering the approach towards change. The awareness of a variety of change perspectives has increased and that variety will help in gaining a deeper understanding of the changes and bring them to life in various ways.[11] The impact of a change process becomes visible by embarking and working on it.

The play metaphor implies that there are players who create context and have impact on the change they envisage. They enjoy tackling challenging situations in which they can develop themselves together with other people.[12] People derive enjoyment from play when they can influence their own lives and wellbeing. A playing attitude calls for the creativity of the players, who challenge each other and develop scenarios that have no marked beginning or end. They enter into the adventure in the space they create together. Change as interaction means that players deal with unexpected events and unpredictable moments, while creating opportunities to develop themselves and enjoy doing so.

In order to exploit the potential of the play metaphor and to overcome the tension between play and profession, it is useful to give flesh and blood to the play meta-

phor by means of a play model. This model makes knowledge manageable and stimulates discussion on the approach to change. It creates a language for change, gives a helping hand getting started and helps those who want to work together on in-depth change and innovation.

PLAY MODEL FOR CHANGE

The play model for change addresses the playing field and the players, the play ambition and play patterns, as well as those playing together to bring about changes and wanting to be players themselves. The play model is dynamic and can be seen as an ongoing motion.
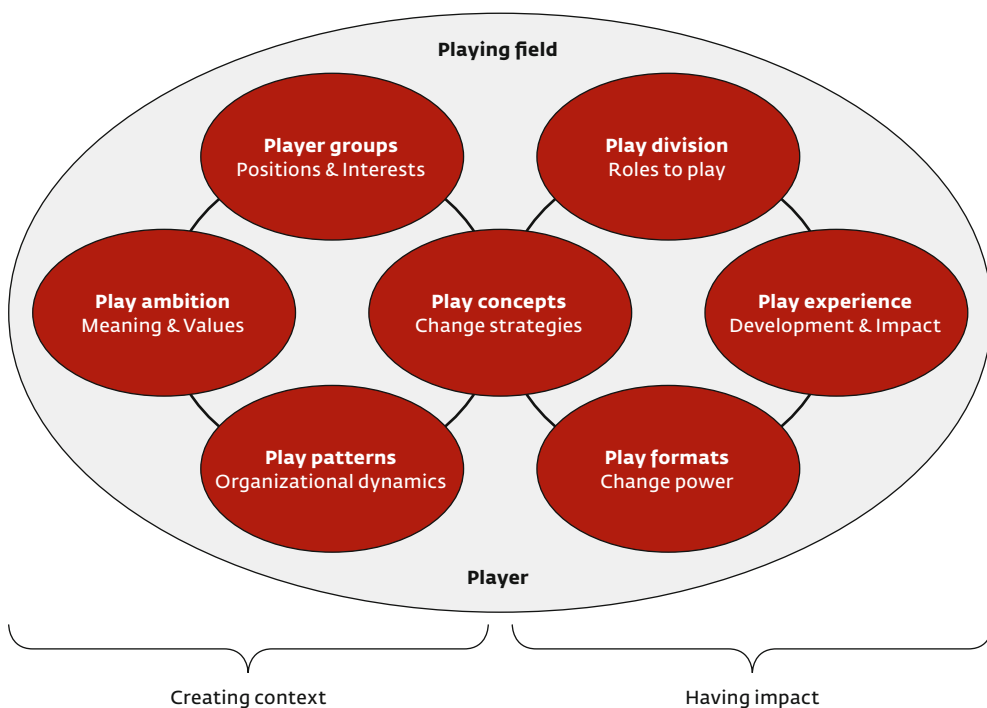
The playing field is about the environment in which organizations perform and what is going on there. On the left there is the play ambition, asking about the raison d'être or the importance of the organization. For the players, it is mapped out which parties are active and may have an impact on the performance of the organization. The play patterns indicate ingrained cultural patterns and which dynamics are present in organizations. From the play ambition, the players and play patterns, a play concept for the approach towards the intended changes, gradually emerges.

The play concept concerns the most effective combination of change strategies. The play division and the roles to play, identify the players involved in the change process and who can contribute to the change. Play formats are about useful activities and supporting actions to achieve progress and make the change successful. The last play element is play experiences. This concerns the way in which changes are experienced, how progress is made and which learning experiences can be shared with regard to successful organization and change.

The play model is about creating a context for change and having sufficient impact to make the desired changes come true. When creating a context for change, the aim is to have sufficient understanding of the playing field, the play ambition, the players and the underlying play patterns. On this understanding it is important to arrive at a well-considered play concept for the changes people envision. The main challenge is to devise an approach to change and create a context to get things going.

Having an impact means further materializing the play concept, so by selecting change strategies with suitable play forms and organizing the division of play the change becomes meaningful. In the play experience, obstacles and results that can be used to make progress, become visible. The main thing is that the players involved bring about a change by deliberately selecting change strategies and forms of play to achieve results.

LANGUAGE OF CHANGE

Language gives shape to our thoughts and thus influences our acts. With the play metaphor this book ignores the language of rational, planned change and introduces a language to give shape to changes in interaction. The languages for planned change and change as play, are contrasted in the figure below.

Language of change: planned change and change as play

Planned Change	Change as Play
Business environment Forces in the environment of an organization driving it to analyze competitiveness and create competitive advantage	**Playing field** Multitude of developments and socio-economic dynamics in the business environment of an organization that stimulate change
Stakeholders Interest groups who can affect or are affected by the achievement of the organization's objectives	**Players on the field** All groups and individuals who interact with members of the organization and could contribute to a desirable future

Planned Change	Change as Play
Change objectives Specific and measurable objectives with clearly defined goals to be achieved by a rational and planned change project	**Play ambition** Meaning, purpose, values and competences of the organization with room for play during a continuous change process
Problem diagnosis Diagnosis of problems in a known situation based on available data and proven organizational assessment instruments	**Play dynamics** Giving meaning to a dynamic environment and jointly identifying events to discover and change play patterns within the organization
Organizational culture Company culture as an explanation of why it is difficult to change and as an instrument of management to gain competitive advantage	**Play patterns** Underlying beliefs, assumptions, values and ways of interacting that contribute to organizational change dynamics
Changing Change as a scheduled and organized tour with clear objectives following a previously planned and fixed route	**Playing** Change as an adventure in which the participants collaborate, gain new experiences and learn from these experiences
Change strategy Planned and rational change strategy guided by top management and related to problem diagnosis and implementation of solutions	**Play concepts** Combination of change strategies that help the various players to contribute to innovation and improvement of their own work context
Change projects A project or program that is focused on clear solutions and based on data, finance, people, resources and results	**Playing together** Emergent change based on interactions during the change process resulting in collective experiences and learning
Planning & control Managing on-going activities based on clear time lines, strict planning and critical deadlines, with systems and procedures for checking progress	**Rhythm & momentum** Searching for the right rhythm and the best moment to leverage positive forces and keep the change process going
Interventions Actions by change managers to steer a change process in a desired direction and to overcome resistance	**Play formats** A vision and way to realize that vision together with those involved, despite uncertainties and chaos
Intervention plan Putting planned interventions together in a consistent coherent change and intervention plan used by managers and change agents	**Interacting and learning** Gaining experience and learning from it through interaction so that the quality of play of all participants is improved
Resistance Political or natural psychological defensive responses to change that must be recognized and eliminated	**Engagement** Expression of involvement and concern by players involved in change, which should be given serious attention
Surface level Planned activities and interventions to steer organizational change as a planned, goal-oriented systemic process	**Undercurrents** Hidden feelings, tensions, emotions and uncertainties of people involved in the change process

Planned Change	Change as Play
Change agents Change managers and change agents with formal positions and directing roles who promote and enable change	**Play division** People collaborating with others who are willing to play a role in a change process and co-create change
Consultants Consultants as experts who help organizations solve issues, create value, maximize growth and improve business performance	**Playmates** Fellow players with a collaborative mindset who offer their contribution to achieving a better change process and positive results
How to change Training people about how to change by professional experts in teaching and supporting change to achieve the intended outcomes	**Living the change** Sharing experiences acquired by players in change who see progress and want to reflect and learn from this to improve themselves
Results Specific, measurable, acceptable, realistic and timebound (SMART) objectives that have to be achieved	**Play Experience** The impact of organizations visible to the players and the potential to learn from collective experience in order to improve continuously
'Homo Economicus' Humans as economic beings using rational arguments and only interested in change if they can make a profit from it	**'Homo Ludens'** Humans as players who enjoy the experience, feel satisfied in play with others, learn from it and are happy that way

SYMBOLS AND COLORS

Symbols and models also help to shape thoughts and reflection, consequently giving rise to action. The play model is an example of this. The play model provides a common frame of reference and a language to open a dialogue and start work to make changes successful. The play model also stimulates reflection on one's own role in change. It challenges players to develop change-related qualities and to make personal objectives come true. The model can be used as a guideline for those who want to collaborate with others and play together when changing their organization. In essence, this book is about recognizing change-related dynamics, making balanced choices in a change context, as well as asking what players deem feasible on the playing field they manage to create.

In this book colors and their meanings will be used.[13] The chart of the colors that are used is given below. The first line for each color contains organizational aspects, the second line shows change aspects.

Colors	Meaning
Dark red	Power structures, power games, competition, fragmentation, fear, chaos Power strategy, pushing through, persuading, deploying power
Blue	Formal structure, hierarchy, control, integration, stability, certainty Rational strategy, persevering, persuading, changing structures and systems
Orange	Turbulence, complexity, tensions, differentiation, uncertainty, conflict Negotiation strategy, bartering, influencing, conflict handling
Red	Motivation, involvement, uniqueness, professional pride and sense of shame Motivation strategy, participation, seduction, appeal to motivation
Green	Cooperation, team development, integration, learning, reflection Learning strategy, developing, connecting, learn to stimulate, strengthening
White	Dynamics, unpredictability, creativity, possibilities Dialogue strategy, self-direction, discovering, entering open dialogue

STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book contains eleven chapters with theoretical perspectives and practical concepts. The chapters are grouped around the play model for changing organizations.

Chapter 1 discusses the playing field of organizations and describes the fascinating complexity and dynamics people in organizations are confronted with. The chapter provides players with advice on how to respond to this complexity and find a balance between stability and innovation.

Chapter 2 is about player groups on the playing field and their interests. The chapter depicts the variety of interests facing people in organizations, gives ideas for making positive use of interests and power processes as well as initiating and implementing changes.

Chapter 3 addresses devising the play ambition, sharing a vision of the future and formulating a corporate strategy to materialize these ambitions and vision. The chapter offers ideas for getting a view of the future and going about bringing this future closer.

Chapter 4 is about play patterns and shows how players in organizations give meaning to their daily work and their ability to handle tensions. The chapter helps to identify the different flows in organizations and to make the underlying dynamics manageable.

Chapter 5 explains how players, in the context of their play ambition, deal with the needs of other players and how they interpret the underlying play patterns, translating them into a play concept for change. The chapter helps to create a positive context for change and considering change strategies.

Chapter 6 further elaborates on the play concept in order to actually achieve changes. A well-considered play concept provides direction and encourages others to play along. The chapter helps to select criteria for change and to combine change strategies in a sensible and feasible approach.

Chapter 7 is about how the play division serve to make change successful. One never makes changes by oneself; the question is who one wants to join in. This chapter contains considerations about organizing the division of play in such a way, that it is clear to all players what efforts and contributions they can make.

Chapter 8 addresses the play formats that are available and necessary to keep the change process going. Helpful activities and supporting actions stimulate a creative interplay and energize players in change. This chapter helps to select and combine concrete activities that will take the change process further.

Chapter 9 describes how players experience change, what contributes to its progress, where change stagnates and when change becomes enjoyable. Attention to play experiences helps to make progress visible, to profit from experiences and to be successful.

Chapter 10 is about players who take the initiative, create context and have an impact on change processes. This chapter helps us define our own position in the change process and to be determined players in the team, contributing to change and innovation.

All chapters shed light on a specific perspective of the play model and their practical application. The perspectives are inter-related and influence each other. In change and innovation, therefore, the interaction of viewpoints and the way in which one attributes meaning to them are important.

The book concludes with an epilogue containing an overview of misconceptions about changing organizations and what players may do to sabotage organizational change. To make change successful, precision is needed in shaping and realizing it. Besides precision, it also needs a true willingness to change and follow one's intuition in creating a valuable play with others.

1

Exploring the playing field

Although there are a large variety of organizations, they all have one thing in common: they are faced with a multitude of developments on the playing field that stimulate change. The environment of which the organizations are part is complex because of dynamic developments in the economy, technology and society, developments that are hard to predict. When creating space to play it is important to be aware of what is going on, understand the world around you and together with others, envisage the future.

EXPLORATION OF THE TERRITORY

At the start of a change progress there will be an exploration of the environment, during which the players focus on the current situation and the future. Relevant questions in this first exploration are: What is going on? What developments can be detected on the playing field? What does the organization believe in? Which factors are essential to its success? Is our organization able to respond to external developments? How do we see the future?

When exploring the playing field, it is of the essence to postpone judgment, not to rush into solutions but to observe events from various angles.[14] During the exploration, observations are shared and a perspective for change is worked on together. When exploring the playing field it is important to be cautious when it comes to labeling. It is about first impressions. From these impressions, those involved can work together on an interpretation of the existing situation, ideas about exploring developments further can be shared and the desired vision for the future can be discussed.

Observing without prejudice

We are normally guided by our viewpoints. An accountant is more likely to look at administrative processes than at human relations, while a management consultant probably looks at the structure of an organization and the corporate processes first. Technical managers mainly look at technical issues and the possibilities for production and construction and an HR consultant will be aware of motivational problems and training options sooner than a lawyer. A good observer knows his own preferences and blind spots and is able to observe what is going on without prejudice. This means that you can never rely on the vision of one group of players; the stories of specific groups will always contain part of the truth. The complex reality of organizations requires that observations are made from different points of view and angles. Visions of problems, solutions and possibilities for the future are always based on subjective experiences. The actual observation of these subjective experiences requires listening and looking without prejudice.[15]

Players involved in change processes are, in fact, constantly exchanging perceptions and adjusting to them. In the end this leads to a common perception of what is going on and what can be done. This way of observing and interpreting is in line with the observations of Karl Weick,[16] who considers organizations as work systems in which people work together and search for meaning. In their interpretation of reality, people speak to and work with other people and exchange perceptions. As a result, reality as it is experienced is always intersubjective. Perceptions of reality are continually reconstructed on the basis of mutual communication and exchange of

ideas. Many perceptions originate in this way, something which those involved are often unaware. It requires sensitivity to trace these implicit perceptions and to find out which basic assumptions color reality and give direction to behavior.

MULTIPLE VIEWS

Many organizations find themselves on fascinating dynamic playing fields. Dynamics arise when developments are unpredictable because they either reinforce or actually weaken each other[17] and as a result, several scenarios can apply and no tested strategy is available.

Contextual developments

On the playing field of organizations many developments take place that influence performance and are of importance for the ambitions being played out and the changes that are needed.

Developments in the economy affect sales markets, investment climate, labor markets and competitive relationships. Globalization of the economy leads to borders fading, bigger markets and more competition; there will be more and more international players on the field. International trade agreements come under pressure, cause tension and lead to new constellations. The flexibilization of labor causes labor relations to change and job security becomes less reliable due to temporary and flexible labor contracts.

Political developments primarily show fragmentation of the political landscape; it is becoming increasingly difficult to form stable majority governments. This causes insecurity in political relations and social instability. With economic setbacks governments usually cut back on spending, whereas economic growth makes for investments in infrastructure, health care, safety and education.

The legal context is relevant for organizations because the legitimacy and legality of organizations emanate from the legal context. The law plays a protective role for citizens and companies. On the one hand laws and regulation are important for organizations as they provide legal protection, on the other they limit the room to maneuver for organizations. Citing regulatory and administrative burdens there has been a lot of debate as to whether laws and regulations are not too restricting on organizations' creativity and room to maneuver. Europe plays a major part in legislation, and international agreements are becoming increasingly important. International laws limit the scope for national laws.

New technology and digitalization contribute to new approaches and business models. Distance hardly plays a role anymore and we communicate in ways quite different than before. On the one hand technological development helps to improve and optimize existing practices; on the other, technological development also raises questions about the future of companies. New technology creates new activities. More and more services and products are offered digitally. Digitalization triggers issues concerning privacy, internet fraud, transparency and security. We are becoming increasingly dependent on technology. For instance, when a communication network goes down companies go down with it.

Social changes have a direct impact on the performance of organizations and what they have to offer. Globalization and digitalization have undeniably made ours an information and network society. The population of Western countries has a majority of highly educated professionals who are independent and ready to take initiatives. Digitalization affects all aspects of social life, whether it is security, health, income, job security, profitability, education, labor, business activity, services, environment or living conditions. This leads to changing social relations and a different way of living together. This in turn raises the question of how we should deal with the dividing line between people who can handle changes themselves and those who have problems doing so.

Cultural developments also have an impact. Global mobility is on the rise and the multi-cultural society is a *fait accompli*, as are the tensions resulting from it. Most large companies have a diverse workforce. Many social groups have their own cultural standards and values and the mores and etiquette that go with them. Cultural standards and values are constantly changing under the influence of new technology, social media, youth cultures and people with different cultural experiences. In the cultural and social field, alongside cultural differences, dividing lines can also be detected between the old and the young, the poor and the rich, national and global, dependent and independent. This makes it necessary to have more contact with diversity.

Ecological and infrastructural developments put higher demands on organizations concerning sustainable production and awareness of climate goals. Environment agencies are demanding that organizations be more conscious of the physical environment. The world population keeps growing, which has consequences for such things as food and water. Climate change is threatening the world-wide availability of drinking water, and while rising sea levels increase the danger of floods, climatic disturbances pose a threat to the food supply in poor countries. The energy transition affects many existing companies and new organizations are emerging, such as energy cooperatives for solar and wind energy.

Contextual developments lead to different outcomes for each organization. Sometimes companies will see opportunities in energy transition, while others see it as posing a threat to their existence and feel forced to change course. Some companies benefit from digitalization, whereas others face the need for enormous investments. In order to assess the ongoing effects of contextual change, it is useful to investigate what are the consequences for the play ambition of an organization and what changes are desirable.

Market developments

The transactional environment, embracing customers, competitors, business partners, suppliers and so on, is a playing field on which numerous players are involved in supplying goods, services and support. Here it is about a balance between supply and demand, often involving products that are closely related to the objective of the enterprise. With globalizing markets, digitalization, internationalization and the formation of alliances, competition will increase and the dividing lines between public and private interests will become less distinct.[18]

With the introduction of market mechanisms in the public domain, new competitive relationships between organizations appear. For instance, local governments are in charge of tendering procedures in home care and youth care, so that several interested parties can put in tenders for care programs. Sometimes commercial companies do so as well. The combination of budget cuts and result-oriented control based on products leads to a downward pressure in social organizations on fees. This results in pressure on operational and innovation costs, as these are usually not included in the price, adding to economies of scale through mergers and alliances between social organizations.

Organizations are increasingly confronted with market dynamics that nobody had foreseen. The number of financiers has increased, citizens put more demands on health care services, the number of competitors has grown and so has the number of supervising bodies. For organizations this means that they have to be sensitive to what is going on in the market and invest more than ever in relationships with parties involved.

With the development of networks in which governments, parties with interests in markets and those directly involved work together, the market is not only a place where transactions are made but also a field of players and interest groups that, in one way or another, can influence the strategy and performance of organizations. These include contracting authorities, financiers, shareholders, sponsors, buyers of

services and goods, clients or those in need, unions, works councils, business partners and competing companies.

Market, government and society

Organizations are active in a field of tension between the contrasting forces of market, government and society. Within these tensions of contrasting forces value is created and the relations between market, government and society are shifting constantly.

Since the '80s of the last century we have seen the role of government shift towards the market.[19] With the help of principles derived from the business world, attempts have been made to modernize the public sector. The necessity of cutting government budgets, combined with an ideological desire to introduce market mechanisms, has led to privatization and liberalization. The approach is businesslike, with more attention given to performing tasks efficiently and measuring results. At the same time attention shifts from articulating political objectives to achieving aims previously agreed upon. Organizations face market mechanisms and accountability for the results obtained. Governments pay more attention to targets, efficiency and effectiveness. In the course of time it also becomes clear that market mechanisms have their limitations and measuring results may lead to undesirable outcomes.[20]

With globalizing markets, internationalizing politics, fading boundaries between public and private interests and the influence of digitalization, it is becoming clear to government authorities that witnessing and tackling issues depends on many different parties. Cooperation between citizens, companies and social actors is required for carrying out complex tasks. This results in new forms of cooperation, including public-private cooperation and the formation of alliances.[21]

In recent years the attention paid to the power of society has grown stronger again. There is more emphasis on the possibilities for communities to take initiatives and contribute to a vital society. In the authorities' perception this means civic participation and self-reliance, which means that citizen themselves are going to do the job that the authorities did before, in the hope that involving society will help to solve hitherto unsolvable problems, and at a lower cost.

The forces acting between government, market and society, make clear how much maneuvering space the organization has in its choice of strategy, the tasks it performs, the structure of its organization and the relationship with target groups and cooperating partners. It is important to understand the position of each organization within these forces and have a clear view of the shifts taking place.

Connecting viewpoints

A multiple perspective yields a broad view on trends and developments on the playing field. Table 1.1 contains an overview of perspectives that help to identify developments on the playing field.

It remains difficult to develop a vision of the future because of the large number of variables that intersect. It is not possible to say what the future may hold or foretell the occurrence of possible disruptions; the future could go anywhere.[22]

With this understanding, it is vital that players in organizations prepare as well as possible for an uncertain future. Exploring the future[23] and drafting future scenarios[24] may help to develop various perceptions of the future and facilitate play with paradoxes.[25] It is essential that perceptions exist side by side and that we search for possible action perspectives that are useful in all scenarios identified. This makes an organization agile in the face of an uncertain future.

Table 1.1   Multiple perspective of the developments on the playing field.

- Contextual developments and vision
  - Economic
  - Technological
  - Political
  - Legal
  - Social
  - Cultural
  - Ecologic;
- Dynamic interactions between developments
- Degree of uncertainty
- Market developments and tensions
- Constraints from the business environment
- Positioning between market, authorities and society
- Institutional embedding
- Social relevance
- Customer satisfaction
- Financial sources and limitations
- Legitimacy and reputation
- Adaptive ability and resilience
- Innovation capacity and agility
- Maneuvering space and urgency
- Direction of change

Parallel to the exploration of the playing field and identifying developments, the challenge is to connect the different points of view of players on contextual changes and arrive at a scenario for the future, as seen by the players.[26] By playing together and having a dialogue about developments on the playing field, people in organiza-

tions visualize their future. Based on these images they can choose to experiment with innovation and by means of practical action, can influence developments on the playing field and thus bring their future closer.

UNDERSTANDING DYNAMICS

Explaining developments on the playing field raises the question of how things will go in the future and how the people involved can play with that future.

Explaining complexity

Many people in organizations experience the environment in which they work as a dynamic one. These dynamics on the playing field can be explained from various viewpoints.[27]

In a *transparent* playing field, developments can be predicted. There is a causal relationship between present, past and future and developments are clear and transferable. Future scenarios and the time perspective within which they will occur are relatively certain, so looking ahead is easy and the play ambition is relatively stable. The play concept for change can be imagined easily as a movement from present to future. The change is like a package tour with a starting point and a destination.

In a complex playing field many developments take place which makes it difficult to determine what they mean for the future of the organization. The developments influence each other, which makes it hard to disentangle them. Through good interaction it is possible to give meaning to what is going on and to discuss the play ambition and the play concepts. This results in an approach whereby players understand the playing field and develop scenarios. By interacting they arrive at the desired changes and change the play patterns if necessary. Change is like a well-planned trip with the destination and itinerary set in advance.

In a *dynamic playing field*, developments continue to influence each other, although it is unclear what the outcome will be. It seems as if everything is changing constantly, with some patterns continuing and showing a certain predictability and others suddenly emerging and prompting change. In this situation the play ambition provides a certain degree of peace and quiet, as it is clear what the organization represents. Existing play patterns however, are put under pressure and require major change. This makes changing a continual process of observation, adaptation and learning. Changes resemble a hiking trip through unknown terrain with players knowing and trusting each other so that they can deal with uncertainty and the unexpected.

In a *chaotic playing field* all kinds of things happen, going in all kinds of directions. There is continuous movement full of surprises and possibilities. In order to appreciate surprises and make use of possibilities, a play ambition is needed in order to make choices in a playing field that offers numerous options. Rules of the game and play patterns are changing constantly and the only thing to go by is one's confidence in good interaction. The approach to change is based on open dialogue, with lots of autonomy to make use of surprises for the purpose of innovation and learning. At this moment, change is an adventure with an unknown destination, full of unforeseen surprises at unexpected moments.

Figure 1.2   Playing fields and action perspectives[28]

	Characteristics	Action perspectives
Transparent playing field	■ Recognizable events and cognizable patterns visible to everyone. ■ Unequivocal and predictable reality that we can describe and predict. ■ Clear cause-and-effect relationships with a best solution at hand. ■ It is understood how much we know and what is going on.	■ Categorize developments and predict the future. ■ Change as a package tour with a clear starting point and destination. ■ Use tested practices and delegate the solutions. ■ Dialogue and interaction between players not necessary.
Complex playing field	■ Complex patterns that require expertise and analysis to detect. ■ Complex reality that calls for analysis to be known. ■ Cause-and-effect relationships can be discovered, but there is no best solution. ■ It is known what we do not know yet, but we will find out when playing.	■ Analyze developments using data and pattern analysis. ■ Change as a well-organized hiking trip with pre-set route and breaks. ■ Use players with knowledge and expertise who present scenarios for the future. ■ Cooperation between experts who explain the future and give advice.
Dynamic playing field	■ Unpredictable developments and unprecedented dynamics. ■ Multiple reality with competing interpretations that produce a rich picture. ■ No solutions but there are possibilities to finding. them through experimenting and learning. ■ It is unknown what we do not know yet, but we will be finding out in the course of our play.	■ Conduct experiments unveiling patterns and thus discovering what is going on. ■ Change as a hiking trip through unknown territory with players who appreciate uncertainty. ■ Create conditions allowing players to experiment, reflect and learn. ■ Open dialogue and interaction between players who want to join.
Chaotic playing field	■ Unpredictable developments with unprecedented dynamics, major turbulence and disruptions. ■ Unknown reality constantly showing new dynamics. ■ Little time to search for solutions, so it is better to act and learn from experiences. ■ Unknown what is and will be going on, so it is better to play and explore.	■ Act and find out what kind of behavior is effective and be sensitive to new events and disruptions. ■ Change as an adventure in an unknown territory with unexpected surprises. ■ Be alert to weak signals and be agile in confronting developments. ■ Open dialogue and constant interaction with a variety of participating players.

Prediction and foresight

There are several ways to estimate complexity and dynamics and create an image of the future.[29] In a transparent and complex playing field, developments can be *predicted* on the basis of analysis of extensive data, extrapolation of data, collecting additional information and modeling by means of algorithms. In this way, an image is created of possible and likely futures. However, in a dynamic and chaotic playing field this method does not suffice and *foresight* is required. Based on developments and impressions possible futures are sketched and a desirable future is visualized. These images of the future could be narratives, metaphors, films, pictures or visualizations. Images of the future are the product of creative techniques, group dynamics and the players' intuition.

Table 1.2 Prediction and foresight

	Prediction by numbers *Numerical, factual, arithmetic*	**Foresight by words** *Linguistic, visual, creative*
Aim	Formulates an expectation of what the future will be like, within what tolerances, getting a grip on the direction of development	Describes the possible future by sketching a rich image of possibilities for arriving at new action perspectives
Activity	Arithmetical exercise in which quantitative data is processed by means of algorithms	Creative exercise in which linguistic, visual and numerical input is used and 'processed' in a creative process
Outcome	A numerical image of the future in terms of probability, which can then be presented in a numerical and visual manner	A visual or narrative series of possible futures, whether or not supported by facts expressing the range of possibilities
Sources	■ Material that can be the basis for arithmetical methods for predicting the future: numbers and arithmetical progressions that can be processed by means of trend analyses and algorithms ■ Algorithms representing the relations between the elements in the system ■ Calculation capacity to analyze and calculate arithmetical progressions with algorithms and ■ a report in which numerical output can be presented: this may be an arithmetical progression, but also an accompanying text explaining the meaning of the number that was found and the range of tolerance	■ All materials that can be the basis for describing possible futures: facts, images, narratives, expectations expressed, pictures, photos, drawings, analogies, examples, shared stories and visualizations ■ Processes containing a combination of analytical and creative activities ■ Involved players who transform the materials into a possible, likely and desired future ■ A format expressing stories and images of the future and their emotional value, e.g. a picture, a narrative, a letter from the future, an eye-witness account, a creative new model, a replica, a film, an exhibition

CHANGE DILEMMAS

In a complex and dynamic playing field it is important to be able to visualize the future, together with others. Combining and sharing observations, impressions and interpretations contributes a more robust image of a possible desired future. The interaction also contributes to a shared view of the future and invites players to join in bringing this future closer.

Embracing uncertainty

Practical actions can give meaning to the near future. The distant future however, remains largely unknown and therefore uncertain. These various types of uncertainty will be discussed briefly below. For well-known events and developments, we know that we *know about* them and we can take them into account. These could be developments in the business environment that can be analyzed and predicted, and on which we can base scenarios for the future. Keeping these scenarios open makes players in an organization flexible in shaping that future.

There are also developments that we *do not know about ourselves* whereas others do know about them. There is so much knowledge that we cannot possibly know everything. This creates uncertainty as we do not know what knowledge is relevant. In order to deal with this uncertainty, it may help to combine the players' perspectives. This applies to such questions as: What can be seen? What do we not see? What do we take seriously and what not? Who joins in the discussion and who is excluded? Who has access to good sources and what knowledge is relevant? By involving players on the playing field in the visualization of the future there will be a richer image, which, in turn, contributes to forces joining in shaping that future.

And then there are events of which we know that *we cannot know them*. We do not know the effect of developments but by acknowledging this, the unknowability is accepted and thus made manageable. We do not know exactly what is happening, but the unknown can be discussed; we can take it into account when we follow developments. This makes players in and around organizations nimbler in developing and adapting scenarios for the future. The scenarios help to make organizations more agile, knowing that all scenarios may come true.

The most disconcerting part is, what *we do not know, that we do not know*. By acknowledging that we cannot possibly know everything, we are talking about developments and events that we cannot foresee. This may make it part of an ongoing dialogue about a future that lies ahead of us but which we cannot see as yet. By

keeping the uncertainty about the future open, there will be a more intense discussion and a richer image of the future. This keeps players in and around organizations alert to what is going on the playing field and creates space to shape a desired future in interaction.

Playing with dynamics

How can players in organizations deal with what is as yet unknown and prepare for surprises? To deal with complexity and dynamics, it is first of all necessary for players to be open to surprises and prepared for possible disruptions.

One way to deal with the unknown is to enhance resilience. The key factor in resilience is maintaining the status quo. A resilient organization survives a shock by bending with it and springing back. Resilience requires a certain toughness so that there is time to deal with shocks and recover from them. In fact, it means that players learn to avoid a relapse into old habits, see opportunities in every shock or crisis and act just a little differently from usual. This implies that events must be reinterpreted again and again, and one should practice deviating from routines and ingrained patterns when the circumstances call for it.[30]

Agility of organizations presupposes that we can deal with surprises, even when it is unclear in advance what that surprise could be. Agility is about continuity by innovation. For players this entails curiosity about the unknown, an open attitude and being permanently alert to detect signals at an early stage. Dealing with shocks and surprises is a continuous process in which weak signals of disruption and incidents are detected. That works well when players are open to disruption of a previously created reality. Detecting weak signs and moving along with the unexpected is easier in organizations that interact with players on the playing field and create room to play because they base themselves on self-organization.

Exploring the future

A practical way to explore the future and generate movement is by bringing players together who know from their own experience what developments are there. They can be found in departments or among players who have widely different experience and backgrounds, and by combining images, a rich picture will emerge. During search conferences all the experiences are brought together and new developments are sought that are outside the scope of the participants.[31] New players can be invited to share their experience and present their vision; in the process a rich image will emerge of what is actually happening.

After the search conference, future conferences can be organized with a varied group of staff members, directors, business partners, trend watchers, academics, policy makers, opinion makers and students. In these conferences images of the future are created and shared.[32] The exploration of the environment and images of the future are brought together in a meaningful story. That story is a point of departure for discussions on a desired future with those who are willing and able to play a part in preparing their organization for the future. In this interaction it is primarily about looking ahead together towards desirable future possibilities and making these possibilities flourish.

Generating movement

In a disordered world with a dynamic and chaotic playing field, in order to arrive at a future that is desired, it is necessary to experiment and learn from doing so. It is no longer only about acting effectively in a regulated and predictable world, but much more about acting and finding new ways through interaction in an adaptive world, with a mixture of events, opportunities and possibilities. By trial and error, it will become clear what is possible and what will happen. The future is brought closer in time by experiencing how it works. At first this will take place on a small scale and with small steps to discern the dynamics and make use of experience for the next steps. Along the way there will be a deeper movement of change and innovation, to which various players will contribute. Understanding of developments in a dynamic and chaotic playing field will be gained by means of experiments and the ability to learn from them.

Figure 1.3   Ordered and unordered worlds of organizing[33]

Adapting

Complex and foreseen	Dynamic and unforeseen
Complicated changes over time	Perceived dynamic patterns
Analyzing causal relationships	Building viable networks
Scenario-planning	Competing ideas and solutions
"Good practices"	"Next practices"
Diagnosing – Assessing – Acting	Experimenting – Reflecting – Learning

Ordered / Unordered

Simple and predictable	Chaotic and farseeing
Known environments	Unknown environments
Cause-effect relationships	Sensemaking and acting
Centralized and structured	Trial and error
"Best practices"	"New practices"
Analyzing – Categorizing – Reacting	Acting – Adapting – Stabilizing

Stabilizing

In the attempt, dynamics on the playing field become tangible, play patterns are revealed and it also becomes clear what we do not know. In this way, trying becomes part of foreseeing, with players on the playing field moving together. The change dilemma is to find a balance between stability and movement, too much movement adds to chaos and unpredictability, while just holding back for a little, is already a considerable step forward. A second dilemma is how much uncertainty in change the players can handle and how much risk is acceptable when trying out new methods. To generate movement, a balance must always be sought between stability and innovation in a dynamic world, so that an organization is able to retain its identity and be prepared for the future.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION

When exploring developments on the playing field, it is wise to pay serious attention to experiences within the organization and collect knowledge from elsewhere such as research institutes, universities and knowledge centers. It is a question of gathering information and experience to enrich images, sharpen knowledge and gain inspiration. A quick and powerful way to put different views on the table is to invite experts to share their ideas. Collecting data on specific issues is a simple way to gain knowledge about developments. There are usually experiences in organizations that are useful for understanding the dynamics of the playing field. It could be helpful to invite employees, customers and business partners to share knowledge and experiences in order to see the bigger picture and what is really happening.

Air France KLM

The *aviation industry* is under enormous external pressure. The *liberalization of aviation*, the emergence of *budget airline companies, new competitors* from the Gulf States and China, and the consequences of *consolidation in the United States*, put traditional airline companies in Europe under pressure to reduce their costs and become more profitable. *Competition* is intense and *prices are being squeezed*. In order for an airline to stand out, a balance needs to be achieved between price and quality delivered. There is pressure to innovate in the service provided. *Customers* want to be able to book and change their flight by *internet* from the comfort of their own homes, and they want to be able to fly to many *destinations* without the hassle of transfers. *Society* imposes increasingly high requirements on limiting the negative effects on the *environment*, and environmental organizations look critically at the sustainability of air traffic. *Stringent safety requirements* and pressure to *reduce costs* require *innovation in the maintenance* of the planes. The question is how a business can deal with these *pressures* and

use them to renew company strategy. KLM and Air France are the first companies in the aviation industry to take the initiative by combining forces. An explanation is given to the staff as to why the company has chosen this *offensive strategy* and how the merger will contribute to making its competitive position stronger. The company is now the largest airline company in Europe with the largest *number of destinations* in the world. For the customer, the new combination offers access to more than two hundred destinations. In joining forces and combining flights, KLM and Air France are improving *service*. Although KLM and Air France continue to operate independently, there is a lot of synergy, for instance, they can procure jointly and customers can use both networks. More importantly, both companies can learn from each other's strong points. KLM has chosen to take a leap forwards in *international expansion* and is able to implement improvement in its global services while reducing costs and *improving return*s. In a time of *economic crisis*, this gives KLM and Air France a huge advantage compared to their *competitors*.

The board chairman of KLM explained that a powerful vision underlies the merger of KLM and Air France, one that involves combining forces to take up a strong position in the *liberalization of aviation* and the rise of *cheap price-cutters*: "We know from experience that the success of a joint venture calls for shared vision and long-term commitment, the simplest of operating rules and fair sharing of revenues and costs. At KLM, we are proud to write a new page in our *history* alongside partners who fully share our exacting *standards of quality* and service. This *strategic partnership* puts us in a good position compared with other major alliances, which are extremely active on the world's leading long-haul market. By integrating our operations, we will give our *passengers* what they desire, more choice, more frequencies, more convenient *flight schedules* and superior *customer services*." Their vision of the future contributes to the strength of KLM and offers possibilities to build an airline that feels strongly about *reliability*, quality and *sustainability* and that gives passengers access to more than two hundred destinations.

Employees of Air France and KLM have strong ties with their own companies and sentiments of *national pride*. At KLM, achieving consensus is important, while decision-making at Air France is organized more hierarchically. Another difference is the attitude to time, the Dutch cherishing their entrepreneurial spirit, aiming more at the short term while the French have an eye for the long-term picture. These findings match research into the major differences between the *national cultures* of the Netherlands and France. Workshops on *cultural differences* are offered to employees who will be dealing with the merger partner on a day to day basis. The idea is to increase awareness of the cultural differences between the two companies and a total of 1500 employees of KLM and Air France have participated in these workshops. In addi-

tion, several hundred senior managers are taking part in two joint five day training sessions. These training sessions contribute to self-awareness, reflection on one's own cultural specificities and building personal networks. An exchange program for young talents was also being set up. Promising KLM talent goes to the headquarters in Paris and potential talent from Air France to work for two years at KLM. The participants produce a book when their exchange ends, giving hilarious descriptions of how unspoken expectations on the part of both companies can differ and how that can create misunderstandings. Bringing the different cultures together and bridging the gap contributes to managers and employees recognizing the positive aspects in each other's culture and fosters a more critical attitude to one's own culture. This results in the cultures of both companies changing subtly and gradually integrating.

CAN WE PLAY TOGETHER?

The play model is a *way of looking* at change as a continuous and ongoing process. It helps understand the complexities organizations have to deal with, and gives an overview of the dynamics on the playing field and the relationships between the players on it. Play patterns become visible. Players are invited to develop a vision of their play ambition. A new play is born in which a play concept gives direction to change. Players find play formats that succeed and are enjoyable. From the enjoyment in playing, new ambitions are formulated, new play patterns are created and the players get better and better at their play.

The play model is also a *way of working*. It helps to reflect on a change, to face tensions and to use them for innovation. It helps to organize interaction and to choose one's own role in a change process. Thus, the play model contributes to the development of change expertise and the strengthening of change potential.

The play model can be used in many ways, as guidance in a dynamic movement and also as an aid in choosing change strategies and play forms. It can also be used to exchange images with the important players with different perspectives of the model and to discover the dynamics of stagnation and innovation together. This creates new perspectives on what is happening and new opportunities to cooperate on lasting change. Working on change and innovation in organizations never ends. It remains an on-going play of change, reasoning and innovating that is best played together.

Change as a collaborative process contributes to enjoyment when progress is made and results become visible. The joy of playing also grows with the interaction itself, in which you get to know each other and you can become proficient in changing organizations. Valuable learning experiences result from overcoming setbacks. When setbacks are overcome, enjoyment increases and this contributes to valuable learning experiences. I wish everyone who wants to play a role in changing their own organization the enjoyment of playing. But above all, many valuable learning experiences based on intention, precision and intuition.

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A positive view on change and innovation in organizations

Change as Collaborative Play is a playful method for change management in organizations. It shows the dynamics in which professionals play a role and collaborate in preparing their organization for the future. The model offers inspiration and practical tools for those who want to contribute to the development of their organization and themselves.

Change as Collaborative Play is essential reading for professionals, leaders, (change) managers, board members, advisors and students who are involved with change in their organizations, a crucial task in the present and future of business.

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