

Images of Change

It is always fun getting the family photo album out and seeing how things have changed by looking at photos of family members taken over time. Do you ever wish you could do the same with an organisation, to have a set of images created over the journey which let you see how it has changed over time?

Over the last 18 months I have been working with a client that has been going through a substantial change.

My work has allowed to me to touch bases with groups of employees at things like leadership development programs and also during business strategy meetings and the like. During these interactions I have been using the Four Rooms of Change™ to help people understand and work through the impact of change on them and the organisation. (See Sidebar)

The Four Rooms of Change has a number of different diagnostic tools that can be used but in this work I have used the ones focussed primarily on understanding change at a personal level, not the ones dealing with organisational change. Despite this the groups I have worked with have still wanted to talk about where their organisation was in relation to the four rooms of Contentment, Self-censorship/Denial, Confusion and Renewal/Revitalisation.

So, if they were interested in the subject then so was I! What we did each time was create a model of what the behaviour of an organisation would be like in each of these four rooms i.e. what would you see, hear, notice about an organisation in each of those rooms.

Having written the results down I then asked them each to place a sticky note on the model showing where they thought their organisation was “right now” based on those descriptors. We did this 20 or so times over the past 18 months in a range of groups of 10-20 people up to a meeting of the entire senior leadership team of around 100 people (including the CEO and Executive Team).

What is the Four Rooms of Change

The Four Rooms of Change is a theory that deals with change, with what happens with people and organizations in transition and with how they can influence the change process by taking responsibility for their emotions and actions.

The model was developed by the Swedish psychologist, Claes Janssen, in the late 60s and early 70s as part of his groundbreaking research on the dynamics of change.

The four rooms - or psychological states of mind - are Contentment, Self-Censorship & Denial, Confusion & Conflict and Inspiration & Renewal. For more information go to the [website](#) or listen to my friend and colleague Angela Scaffidi explain it on [YouTube](#).

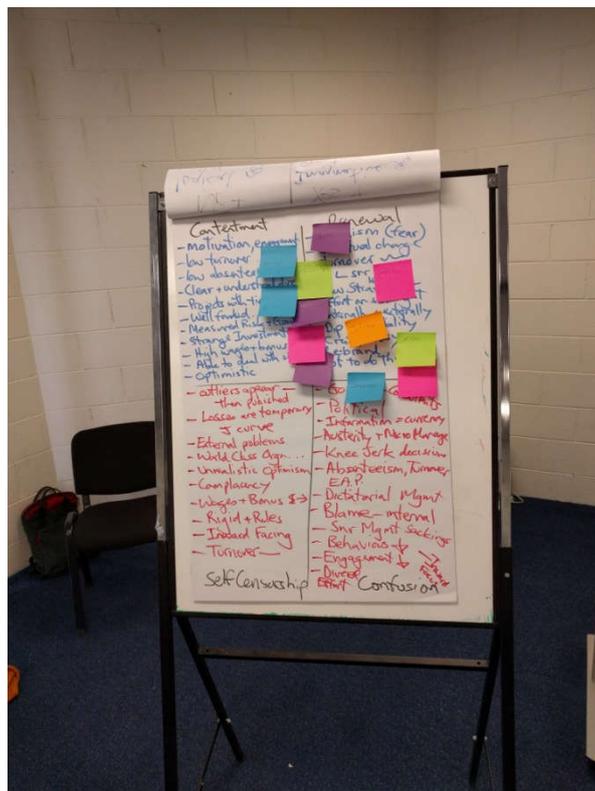


It is not often that a facilitator gets to run the same process within the same organisation over an extended period of time, so it has been interesting for me to reflect on what I learned over that period.

1. Using the Four Rooms of Change to discuss change seems to consistently produces a depth and honesty of discussion that is usually absent from these sorts of conversations.
2. Differences in seniority are not barriers to discussion. More junior staff find it possible to raise and express concerns about where the change is going without being paralysed by the fear of offending. Senior staff are able to respond without feeling the need to defend their choices and instead talk about why they made them and what needs to be done.
3. Discussions are “useful” instead of defensive or accusatory – they focus on shared objectives and desires, an honest exchange of views and an understanding that each of the four rooms has a valid and useful role in the change process.

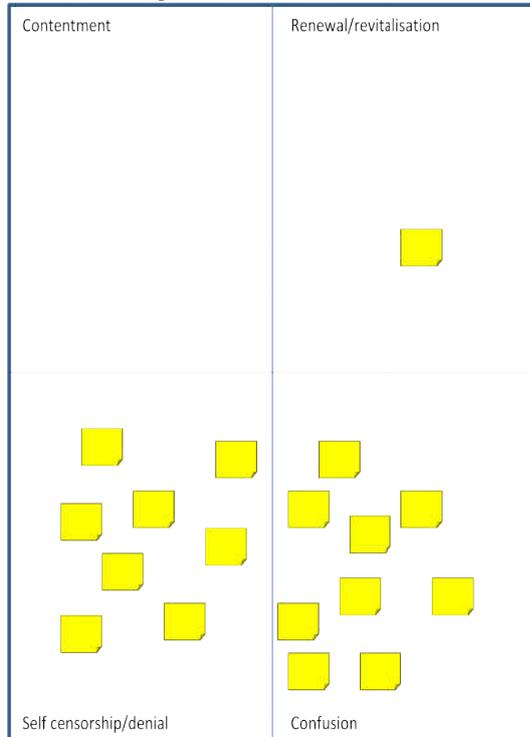
And finally, because I have been running the same process over nearly 18 months I am able to describe the organisational journey through change by reference to where people put the sticky notes on their chart of the “organisational” Four Rooms of Change.

I wish now that I had taken photographs of the various “charts” right from the beginning – but here is a photo of one of the most recent ones. In this instance people clustered their sticky notes mainly in the Renewal and Revitalisation room and trending towards Contentment.

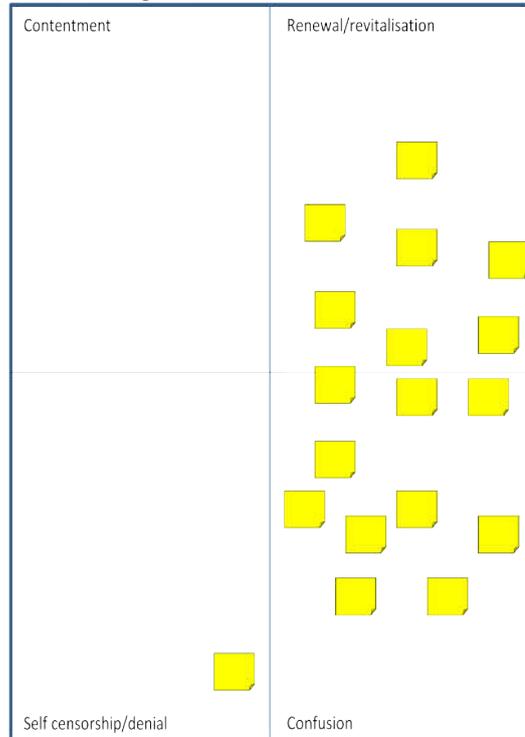


Not all the charts have been so consistent, usually there is quite a spread of opinions but there is still an ability to see a general pattern each time. The really satisfying thing for me has been to watch the charts over the last 18 months to see as the sticky notes have gradually moved around the Four Rooms in a counter clockwise direction, as the model predicts.

18 Months ago



6 months ago



This is the first time I have been able to “show” an organisation how their change journey has progressed over time. Even better it has been done in a way which is immediately understood by participants and without the need for any expensive and invasive surveys and their boring feedback sessions.

The only lesson to be learnt – for me to take more photos at the start of any similar process in the future.

David Gunzburg

Director DGHR Services