

Intervening and interventions: an overview.

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1. Introduction

Interventions are the tools of the management consultant. Intervening is the the basic instrument of a management consultant. That is why knowledge about interventions and intervening is important for every consultant and for preparation for the profession. This article gives an overview of the possibilities for interventions and intervening.

It explores the art of intervening and interventions, and how interventions fit within a change strategy. First, interventions as activities for change will be discussed. Multiple coherent interventions constitute an intervention plan. To help to design a well-considered intervention plan, several interventions will be presented, distinguishing interventions aimed at individuals, groups, organizations, and also at organization networks. Interventions are subsequently ordered according to different change strategies and analyzed in terms of their operative ingredients or active substances. Four basic paradigms concerning change and intervening are considered in order to invite the reader to ponder his or her own dominant view in this regard. That insight can help the change agent to make deliberate choices for specific interventions within a change process, and the many examples discussed will offer an overview of intervention options. This text thus offers broad insight into the world of intervention and all that is available, helping the change agent to make well-informed choices as to which interventions are best suited to a specific situation and a specific change objective.

2. Intervention and intervention plan

The word 'intervention' can be used to refer to diverse matters. For example, it can be used to describe the utterance of a single sentence: someone says something to somebody else, and the speaker will call this an intervention. But it is also used for events on a much larger scale: a modification of national legislation with regard to job dismissals is also referred to as an intervention. Here the term: intervention is used in a specific way, which will be explained in the next section.

2.1 Interventions

This article is about interventions as activities for change. The description that is favored here: an intervention is one or a series of planned change activities that aim to help enhance the effectiveness of an organization. They are deliberate activities undertaken by one or more change agents in order to achieve certain results (Cummings & Worley, 2009; De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004; French & Bell, 1999).

The various terms used in this description can be elucidated as follows:

- it can involve a *single* activity or a *series* of activities. For instance: a certain training program for a particular group is an intervention. Or it may consist of several training programs for different target groups. Or the program can consist of an intake procedure, a course and a follow-up. Or there are peer supervision sessions alongside the training program;
- *planned* refers to the wish of the change agent to exert influence in a certain desired direction. Although we know well enough that we cannot predict or guarantee all outcomes, we do of course wish to apply those interventions that will achieve something;
- *effectiveness* refers to the intended results of the interventions. Some interventions deliver just a tiny contribution. Sometimes, the intended effect is a heightened awareness, which is difficult to achieve and difficult to establish. It can also be about becoming aware of something or learning to stop doing something. These are all examples of intended effects;

- the description contains the word *help* because an intervention can either be more or less directly steering, or supportive. For example: communication about the training program is supportive of the program, while the program itself is the direct intervention.

2.2 Interventions as part of a change strategy

A change process consists of a number of phases or steps. It starts with a diagnosis: What is the matter?; What is happening?; Where is it happening? The diagnosis helps form a clear picture of what is going on.

The next step is to identify the *core of the issue*. This may concern the sore spot: What are people losing sleep over? What is causing pain? But it can also be about the germs of change: where do we find the opportunities, the energy, the forces that can bring about change? The goal is to order the diagnostic information, to map the links and relations between that information, and to formulate the essence of the matter.

After that it's time to determine the *change strategy*: what are the principles that we wish to apply to our approach? What is the overall philosophy? What process do we wish to initiate? The change strategy is a deliberate choice for certain levers in the change process.

An essential part of the intervention plan is making choices to achieve a successful *implementation*. Which interventions are suitable for the change strategy? In what sequence should they be implemented? Where do they conflict with each other, and where do they reinforce each other? In short: how do we develop an approach in which the change strategy is converted into something that can be done and can be organized? If this is not done, the isolated interventions are likely to lose their effectiveness. Or, it may emerge that the change process rests on just a few shoulders, while it should be shouldered by several pioneers. Or, that the results remain limited to just a few persons. It

is important for these reasons to permanently bear in mind the coherence between the various interventions.

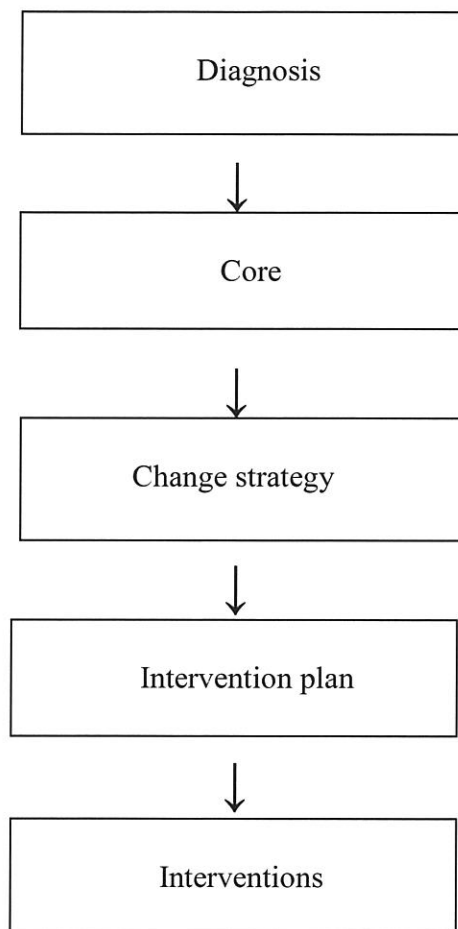


Figure 1. Phases in a change process

2.3 Intervention plan

What exactly does an intervention plan entail? It is a focused, balanced, communicable and relevant plan for activities to achieve intended outcomes (De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004 a).

That it is *focused* means that the interventions reinforce each other to penetrate ‘deeply’ enough into the organization, as envisioned in the change strategy. The point is to have small or larger interventions mesh together synergetically, so that they consolidate and create a snowball effect. A series of small pushes while rolling will cause a snowball to

grow. This could include a communal learning program as main intervention, flanked by options for peer supervision or coaching. The operative principle here is a learning process in which the interventions enhance each other.

Balanced means that the plan incorporates all components of planned change that play a role in organizational change. It is a step-by-step plan, but it also takes account of the actors, communication and sense-making, of transfer, supervision and reflection.

Communicable means that the plan is a smart simplification of what is about to happen. The plan must be explicable to others in a few core concepts and principles, so that those involved can understand it and can fulfill their role. In this way, all expectations are managed and the intentions clarified.

Metaphors, one-liners, drawings and schemes can be useful tools in this communication.

Relevance means that you can reasonably rest assured that the intended results will be achieved; that you may assume that the efforts and interventions will prove sufficient; and that the final result will be worth the effort.

An intervention plan is a composite of interventions, alongside each other and succeeding each other. Interventions are the activities that need to be performed to accomplish organizational change.

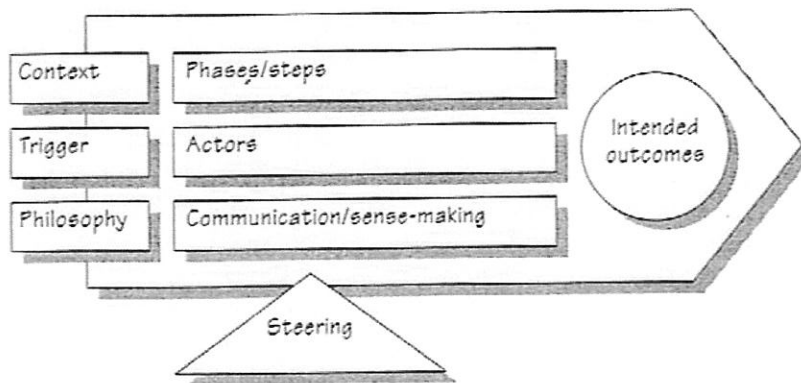


Figure 2. Elements of every intervention

Building blocks of interventions

Every intervention ideally consists of six building blocks, namely: the history, outcomes, roles, phases, communication and evaluation. These building blocks are briefly explicated.

The *history* refers to the interventions or events that preceded the intervention. It is the context within which the intervention is to take place. It is also the reason for the intervention. No intervention ever appears out of the blue.

The *outcomes* concern what we wish to achieve. What are the intended effects? What do we perhaps wish to achieve directly, and for what do we aim to create the right conditions?

Roles are about who does the coordinating or the steering; or, conversely, who will be the victims. And who are the spectators in the stands?

Phases refer to the ordering of the process in steps or part-processes. What comes first, and what follows later?

Communication and sense-making. People will talk about the intervention, they send and receive information. How do you inform people? How do you get them involved? How can they make sense of the change and the world around?

And finally: how will we *evaluate*? How do we steer the process? What adjustments should we make? What lessons do we learn?

These six building blocks are part of every intervention. They need to be thought through for each intervention, also since they can vary per intervention. They form something of a checklist: when devising an intervention, change agents need to think through these six building blocks.

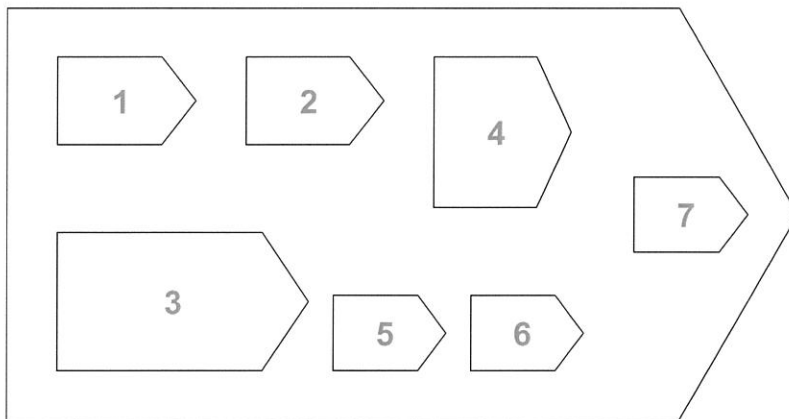


Figure 3. Intervention plan with seven interventions

How can one categorize interventions? The nature and types of interventions are virtually infinite. There are various overviews available. Each change agent moreover has a list stored on his own mental hard drive. The added value of such overviews is that it can prompt new ideas and point you towards unexplored possibilities. It is therefore every change manager's professional duty to be familiar with a broad range of interventions, so

that they remain aware of approaches that are better than the ones they are competent to perform. This article categorizes interventions in terms of three dimensions. This categorization may help change agents to expand the perspective on interventions and help change agents to choose deliberately for specific interventions.

The first dimension is the one targeted by the intervention: the object of the intervention. This involves a discussion of interventions in terms of individuals, groups, organizations and collaboration or networking between organizations.

The second dimension concerns the operative principles or the active substance of the interventions. Here is referred to the colors of change: yellow, blue, red, green and white.

Finally a category based on underlying patterns of thought, or paradigms is presented.

First the intervention category constituted by the object of the intervention is described.

3. Interventions aimed at individuals, groups and organizations

Interventions can be aimed at an individual. The aim can be to influence or to change a single human being. To name a few examples of such interventions::

- having dinner with your enemy, or appointing an assistant to serve as jester
- making a personal plan or committing to something
- pursuing a career; two-sided communication
- coaching or mirroring someone
- steering yourself and giving meaning to your own life.

There are several specific group interventions aimed at improving how groups and teams operate. These interventions can be used particularly if new groups and departments have been formed, or if departments or groups wish to improve their performance.

These interventions are geared to influencing or changing a group of people. Again, to list a few examples:

- In diagnostic department discussions, members of a group start collecting, analyzing and evaluating data concerning the department's performance. Based on this diagnosis, plans are developed to improve how the department or group functions.
- The performance mirror is a specific procedure to obtain information about how a department performs, by asking clients or other departments to hold up a mirror to the department, reflecting the way it operates, the products it creates, and its collaboration with others.
- The task analysis technique aims to clarify the expectations that people have regarding the performance of tasks. Groups operate better if the members know of each other how they understand the task, what priorities they set, and what expectations they have of one another.
- Analyzing and discussing the roles fulfilled by people in a team; this concerns roles and patterns of behavior that people enact based on habits and on notions of how they ought to act. Through social activities or by explicating team roles and patterns of cooperation, cooperation processes can be improved.

- Building a tightly-knit group can be pursued through group training, team development or peer supervision, with people evaluating each other and providing feedback on their contribution to the team or the department. Trainings can result in improved performance if the training is appropriate to the training and education needs experienced by individuals and groups, and if the training is linked to one's own work situation.
- An appreciative inquiry can be conducted whenever the group or team achieves an excellent performance, also to see what lessons can be learnt for future performance.

Organizations are always home to multiple groups and parties with different tasks, interests, expectations and backgrounds. There are also interventions that specifically aim to improve the cooperation between groups. To name two examples:

- Image breaking ('iconoclasm') is particularly suitable if groups hold stereotypical and negative images of each other and communication is virtually impossible. This intervention seeks to deflate the images that the groups have of each other. The groups each draw up a list of their thoughts, attitudes, feelings and perceptions of the other group, and a second list with their predictions as to what the other group will say about them. At a plenary meeting, the different group images are exchanged. People may ask questions, but discussions and providing explanations are prohibited. The two groups then separate again, and are asked to ponder why the other group sees them as they do, and what they have discovered about themselves and about the other group. After the groups exchange their diagnoses in a second plenary meeting, all sorts of erroneous perceptions and misunderstandings will evaporate, and the cooperative climate improves accordingly.
- Tensions between groups can also be solved through negotiation and problem-solving with the help of a third independent party, for instance a mediator. To be successful, both parties must be motivated to solve the problems, must both accept the *third* person as mediator, and should not differ too much in terms of their position of power. Third-party interventions are actually aimed at realizing

structured negotiations, with the independent mediator devoting much time and energy to exploring possible resolutions to the conflict.

The third category of interventions concerns organizations. Such interventions are of course aimed at changing the organization in its totality. Five out of many examples are given here:

- a strategic alliance or strategy to achieve market dominance
- redesigning or reengineering work processes
- enhancing mobility and aligning tasks to people's talents
- quality circles or an open planning
- quest conferences, rituals and mysticism.

Finally, there is a category of interventions aimed at improving how organizations work together. Increasingly, organizations are collaborating through networks. This ranges from supply networks, to collaboration between logistics firms, to organizations active in youth and safety programs.

- A frequently used intervention to create collaboration between organizations is to draw up collaboration agreements, to establish a joint venture or to build alliances between enterprises. Alliances are often formed with a view to joint market strategies, international cooperation, improving distribution and operational management and collaborative product innovation. The alliances in the airline industry and the production specific products are notable examples.
- Chain collaboration and working in networks are often intended to solve coordination issues between organizations. To stimulate collaboration in chains and networks, process management is a viable intervention that starts with mapping all relationship patterns and networks. The next step is to build trust by becoming acquainted with each other's viewpoints, experiences and bottlenecks. This is then followed by seeking new forms of collaboration in which the organizations concerned can maintain their own identity, while at the same time expand their external influence.

Change strategies and intervention plans practically always seek a mix of interventions at all these levels. After all, to change something in the organization especially requires an effort to change certain individuals. Or, you may have determined that certain groups fail to work together as a team; you can then apply team-specific interventions to develop the skills required to work as a team.

4. Interventions categorized in terms of operative principles

Five basic approaches to change processes can be distinguished (see De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004a & 2004b).

These five approaches have, for reasons of communication, each been assigned a color. These colors can be used to categorize interventions. With reference to each color, the associated conditions for success, the operative principles and the effects of applying specific interventions will be discussed. Each color explanation is followed by examples of interventions in the color concerned (see De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004a; Beer & Nohria, 2000)

4.1 Yellow-print thinking

Yellow-print thinkers consider a change successful if it results in general support for an important decision. It would be even better if we all agree and thus reach consensus. A good deal or wise decision has been made, there is no more opposition, and all resistance fades away.

The operative principles are: the will to win or to dominate, or the fear of losing. It helps enormously if there is some threat or a great sense of urgency: this really gets people going and open to change. Get people to feel a bit anxious, and they will come out into the open.

This approach is especially effective in changing power relationships or achieving a new balance of power. However, it can also politicize relationships and prompt irrational behavior.

A change agent that intervenes in this color will typically believe that there first has to be a *report* outlining the main changes and especially the *necessity* of those changes. This report is drawn up by a number of people inside and outside the organization. Next, a *steering group* needs to be composed on the basis of equality with representatives of various groups within the organization, to formulate a *shared vision* as an answer to the problems identified. In any case this *working group* must contain key figures or *opinion*

leaders, for if they do not support the change process, nothing at all can get done. It is also important to secure the *Works Council's commitment*, at an early stage. The decision-making process must be conducted with due care, though the final decisions are of course made by the executive staff.

This will inevitably meet with *resistance*, and this must be dealt with smoothly. Perhaps an outside person, a *third party*, can serve as lightning rod. The people that want to make the change happen and will fulfill the new positions become the *advance troops* for the change. *Opponents* are brushed aside.

4.2 Blue-print thinking

Blue-print thinkers consider a change successful if the predetermined results are achieved within the planned and predefined parameters. As a result, the organizational processes have become more effective or more efficient; or, it has become clear who is responsible for what, offering a firm grip on the matter at hand. No one needs to ask 'What exactly is the story?' anymore, since everything has now been clarified.

The operative principles are rational arguments, facts and proofs. Is that really how it is? Has it been demonstrated? Blue-print thinkers always aim for the best, believing that the best can always be found. It is also important to have a grip on everything. Control is essential.

This approach always introduces rationality, by means of proofs and demonstrated improvements. It also entails a simplification of reality and is geared to solving problems and controlling processes.

A change agent that intervenes in this color has a *clear plan* in mind. What are the concrete results that we wish to achieve, what are the benefits of the change in terms of *measurable improvements* and how can we accomplish that change with maximum efficiency?

The first step, therefore, is to conduct a *study* that compares our work methods or results with the *benchmarks* of comparable organizations. If we appear to deviate negatively, we will recruit *external experts* to help us draw up a plan to remedy this deviation. We then

appoint a *project leader* with the responsibility of executing the plan. The *principal* monitors the process and, at scheduled intervals, makes adjustments if called for. The plan proceeds according to clear, time-bound *mileposts*, and is executed by *internal and external experts*. External experts are brought in if the expertise required is not available in-house.

4.3 Red-print thinking

Red-print thinkers consider a change successful if people feel connected to it, if they feel it is part of themselves; that they have a sense of psychological ownership, as it were. By extension people feel that they are recognized and valued. People don't get trampled underfoot: their development proceeds in tandem with that of the organization. The atmosphere is good, things feel right, and people feel proud. And as a result we work well together.

The operative principle is to give people attention and to take them seriously. People want to have a sense of belonging and this organization and this change will give us the bonding and the good atmosphere that we seek.

This approach introduces humanitarian values. People are appreciated and are seen and heard. They are motivated, stimulated, and encouraged.

A change agent intervening in this color will want the change to work like a magnet. Instead of shoving the change down people's throats, the point is to *make it attractive* so that people want to have it, want to be part of it, will move towards it of their own accord. The change strategy is to *entice* people to implement the change. That's why the change agent will use a lot of *communication* and communication channels. But he will also gather people together, and even organize *social activities*. The emphasis is on *working together*, so there is some 'click' between the people who need to be involved in this change. Of course they will need to get used to each other and to get the hang of the process. If *task expansion* and *task enrichment* are possible, this will contribute hugely to people's motivation. In this way they are drawn towards closer involvement with the

work. We should therefore check with them regularly *how they are doing* and how they feel (regarding the change).

4.4 Green-print thinking

Green-print thinkers consider a change successful if people want to learn and want to reflect, and actually do so too. For learning and changing are in fact synonymous: when people learn they change, and when they change they learn. Sometimes the point is for people to unlearn something.

Doors and windows are wide open and we pick up signals from everyone around, and everyone around is open to signals from within and from outside. Customers, suppliers and other outsiders can count on a willing ear, and the organization is eager to satisfy new wishes or demands from that side.

The operative principle is that people are inquisitive and always interested in something new. People want to learn. They are passionate in their professional work and want to acquire new knowledge. They have the capacity to reflect and will therefore recognize on their own if things fail to move in the right direction.

This approach will cause people to explicate what they are doing and what they are thinking. They adapt to their environment, they learn and they experiment, and they are continually pushing their limits. They learn from and with each other in groups and in organizations.

A change agent that intervenes in this color focuses particularly on *how people see their own work*, what views they hold of their work, how they perform their work, and especially *how they think they could perform better*. But then they will first have to acknowledge that perhaps they aren't doing the best they can, of course. And they will need to figure out what they wish to improve and how it can be improved. In this way, people expand their *competence* to learn. They *learn* to accept differences and they learn to deal with each other's differences.

Learning *to utilize each other's qualities* is this interventionist's ideal. And for that you first need to know them, accept them, and make them productive. This can be achieved

through all sorts of learning setups: *courses, lectures*, but also and especially through *action learning* projects, *on-the-job-training, coaching, peer supervision, gaming, clinics* and so on. The two main groups of interventions here are in fact: *mirrors* (that show you how you do things) and *windows* (that reveal new perspectives). This propels people into action.

Working with role models (that is, people that set the right example in their conduct) and with good practices (as illuminating illustrations) are favorite tools. *Feedback* and *reflection* are the favorite components of those tools.

4.5 White-print thinking

White-print thinkers consider a change successful if there is entrepreneurship: people want to do things, want to know why they do them, and they devote themselves to it. They are self-directing, self-aware, are bursting with energy and full of life. They search for others and for situations that suit what they want. They connect to others in meaningful situations. Makeability acquires the following meaning: if this is what we want, then who is to stop us?

The operative principle is energy, vitality, and the power inherent in people. They are eager, and therefore daring, and they really go for it. Of course they also keep things in perspective and apply a healthy dose of humor and self-derision, as you can always see things from another angle.

The overall result is that everything becomes more complex. Which is not a problem, as it's just a simple fact. This adds meaning to what we say and do, through a profound interaction by which we seek what we actually mean. It introduces dynamism, and people learn to look and see differently. What are actually the assumptions underlying what we say? What are our blind spots? And how about our preferences? We learn to deal with paradox and ambiguity. These are essential elements of our existence.

A change agent intervening in this color is not going to simply think up what could be done or what could be good, but will first *look to see what there is*, what is already happening and already going on. And he will look to see how he can *consolidate and*

facilitate those processes. Removing obstacles might turn out to be much more important, since these frustrate people's drives and motivation. He will create *room for own initiatives*, for own ideas, new perspectives, innovations and creativity. People with similar motives bond with each other and arrive at meaningful actions. They will do the appropriate thing because they believe in it. Organizational activities will tap into people's energy. They are the mission and the strategy and the change. *It all starts from people themselves*, from within. They *tell each other stories* about the things they've experienced, and the things that they believe in. There will also be *conflicts*, of course, but these will be resolved in all openness and trust, if necessary and if the time is right. People jump on board a change if their own goals accord with the objectives of the change, and will jump off if that is not or no longer the case.

Table 1. The five colors at a glance

	Yellow-print	Blue-print	Red-print	Green-print	White-print
Something changes when you...	Bring common interests together	Think First and then act according to a plan	Stimulate people in the right way	Create settings for collective learning	Create room for spontaneous evolution
In a/an...	Power game	Rational process	Exchange exercise	Learning process	Dynamic process
And create...	A feasible solution, a win-win situation	The best solution, a brave new world	A motivating solution, the best 'fit'	A solution that people develop themselves	A solution that releases energy
Interventions such as...	Forming coalitions, changing top structures, policy making	Project management, strategic analysis, auditing	Assessment & reward, social gatherings, situational leadership	Training and coaching, open systems planning, gaming	Open space meetings, self-steering teams, appreciative inquiry
By...	Facilitators who use their own power base	Experts in the field	Procedure experts who elicit involvement	Facilitators who create settings for learning	Personalities who use their being as instrument
Who have..	A good sense for power balances and mediation	Analytical and planning skills	HRM knowledge and motivational skills	OD knowledge and feedback skills	An ability to discern and create new meanings
And focus on...	Positions and context	Knowledge and results	Procedures and working climate	The setting and communication	Patterns and persons

Result is...	Partly unknown and shifting	Described and guaranteed	Outlined but not guaranteed	Envisioned but not guaranteed	Unpredictable on a practical level
Safeguarded by...	Decision documents and power balances	Benchmarking and ISO systems	HRM systems	A learning organization	Self-management
The pitfalls lie in...	Dreaming and lose-lose	Ignoring external and irrational aspects	Ignoring power and smothering brilliance	Excluding no-one and lack of action	Superficial understanding and laissez faire

In this section the interventions are categorized in terms of operative principles. It is clear that each color and the associated interventions have their own criteria for effectiveness and success, have their own operative principles, and that their application achieves different effects. It is also illustrated how change agents intervene in the different colors, how they think and what they do.

Next, the interventions will be categorized according to the underlying paradigms and mental patterns. This produces a different insight into and oversight of the interventions.

5. Interventions categorized according to mental patterns and paradigms

Burrell and Morgan (1979) have developed a 2x2 matrix to clarify four types of approaches to change. These approaches are directly linked to our basic assumptions about the human individual and the relationship between the individual and his or her environment. They distinguish the functionalist, the radical, the humanist and the interpretative paradigm. These four paradigms and their significance for choosing interventions will be elaborated in the following section (also see Boonstra & De Caluwé, 2007; Boonstra, 2004).

Functionalist paradigm

The functionalist paradigm strives towards a predictable and orderly world in which people work together and live together. Organizations have a clear-cut task structure and reporting lines with clearly circumscribed positions. There is little attention for contradictions; these are denied, solved or eliminated. The methodical approach concentrates on the efficient organization and effective planning and regulation of change processes. Often, change managers plus advisers are appointed to provide for strategic planning and planned change. Examples of interventions based on this paradigm include: Business Process Redesign, the Balanced Scorecard, Total Quality Management, Time Based Competition, strategic planning, restructuring, reorganization, competency management, training programs and implementing selection, appraisal and reward systems. These interventions are tried and tested, defined in protocols, and are widely used. I shall elaborate some examples of such interventions further on (section 5.1).

Radical paradigm

The radical paradigm concentrates on structural conflicts and conflicts of interest, with a particular interest in dominance issues, and for instance for the exploitation of workers and the depletion of natural resources. It investigates quality of life issues and issues of management and governance that organizations introduce into the public arena. Seen

from this perspective, change arises through fundamental conflicts, such as political and economic crises. There is a notion that organizations can only survive if they adapt to changing circumstances. There is a great deal of interest in alliance formation, collaboration and inter-organizational forms of organization. The potential for and effects of scale-expansion are carefully considered. The focus is on strategies for survival and continuity. There is a specific interest for structural changes in ownership relationships and governance structures. The government attempts to mitigate the harmful effects of scale-expansion, exploitation and depletion through international treaties, covenants, supervision, legislation and enforcement, and by promoting compliance. A decent and orderly approach to power and power differences, and seeking to achieve suitable balances of power, form the core of this paradigm. Conflicts must be avoided (see section 5.2).

Humanist paradigm

According to the humanist paradigm, people are intrinsically motivated to work towards a radical improvement of working and living conditions. The paradigm is based on subjective, interpretive and voluntaristic assumptions, and it sheds light on patterns of dominance and emancipation. This approach sees people seeking ways of changing existing social relations and of overcoming patterns of dominance. Reality is a social construct but is bound to the constraints that people create for themselves. This is something that they should realize and come to understand, and they need to undertake collective action in order to change or transform this. Contemporary themes are the alienation and the dissociation of thought and action that have come to characterize modern society. The goal of the humanist paradigm is to liberate people from sources of domination, alienation and repression by criticizing the mechanisms that preserve these sources, with the intention of changing them. In the interventions, people holding different perspectives are brought together to personally transform their work and life situation. Conflicts are viewed as healthy and conducive to change. Examples of such interventions include: forward-looking quest conferences, large group interventions, creating disorder within order (for instance through humor or self-derision), raising awareness and dialogue. See section 5.3.

Interpretative paradigm

The interpretative paradigm sees people seeking to understand what is going on through subjective experiences and perceptions. The basic assumption is a subjective and interpretative vision of reality, and that people are personally capable of changing their reality. After all, reality is understood as socially constructed by people that work, live and speak with one another. The interpretive paradigm aims to understand the subjective and constructed world. The methodology is based on collecting systematized experiences through case studies, individual experiences, and action research. The theory of continuous change is well suited to this paradigm. According to this theory, change is a continuous process at local level in which people interact with each other and give meaning to their own social reality. In the course of change processes, images of reality are exchanged, interaction patterns are uncovered, and changes take shape through a dialogue among the actors. For the interventions this means that contexts are created and processes are supported that allow actors to personally give shape to change processes. The essence of interventions is that feedback processes are organized, that there is room for self-organization, that meaningful interaction is achieved, that multiple perspectives are applied, that variety is encouraged, that a plurality of voices is heard, that assumptions are made explicit, that a shared experience arises, and that alternative courses of action are developed. The processes of learning, reflecting and acting coalesce. See section 5.4.

Below a number of examples of frequently used interventions are described, starting with interventions based on the functionalistic paradigm, then the radical paradigm, followed by the humanist paradigm, and finally the interpretive paradigm. This last paradigm will be discussed at greater length on account of a growing interest for it, while at the same time it remains fairly unfamiliar terrain for many.

Changing radically

- Structural conflict
- Forms of dominance
- Contrasts
- Emancipation
- Possibilities

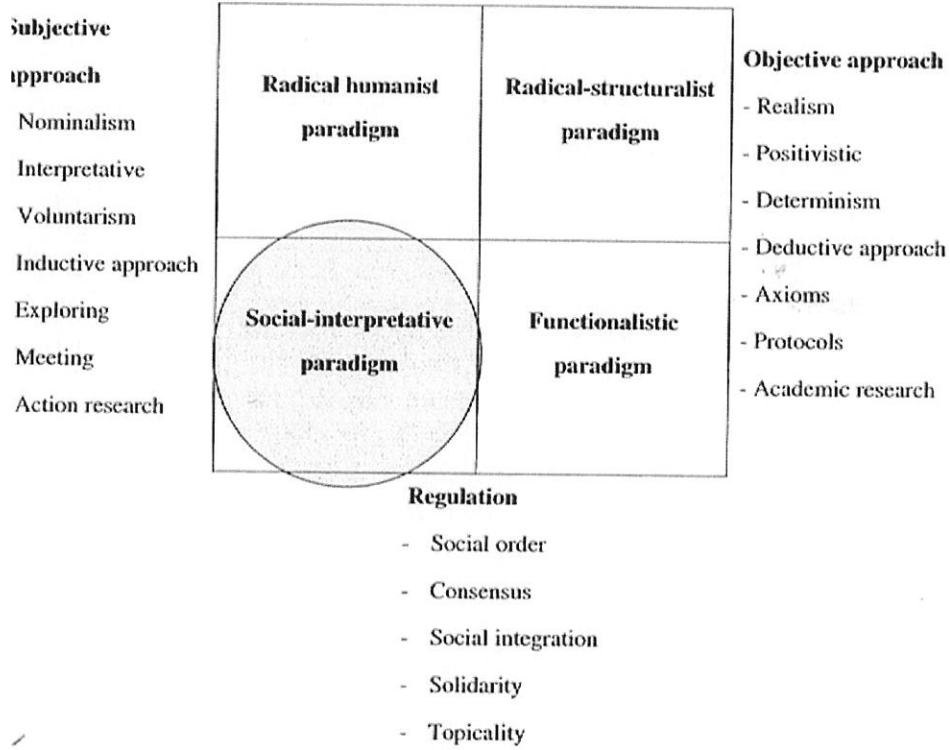


Figure 4. Paradigms of organization, learning and change

5.1 Interventions based on the functionalist paradigm

These are the interventions that people active in organizational change are most familiar with. They are clearly described in several handbooks (see for instance: Cummings and Worley, 2009). Often, research is reported into the effects of these interventions and into indications and contra-indications: when are they appropriate to use and when not, and what are the necessary conditions? These interventions can be seen as instruments, tools or methods that you can apply as change agent, in order to achieve change in the organization. These interventions are again sub-divided into four categories (Cummings and Worley, 2009).

These categories are:

- strategic interventions
- techno-structural interventions
- human resource management (HRM) interventions
- process interventions.

Strategic interventions establish a connection between the organization and the organization's environment. They aim to change the organization in order to keep up with the changing environment. This could be, for instance, because new target groups or new customers have emerged, or because the organization wishes to secure a more robust market position, or it wishes to develop new work methods, and so on. These interventions generally affect the entire organization, rather than just a part of it. They serve to create a harmonious whole, as it were, of the company's strategy, the structure, the culture and the environment. The result is that everything fits snugly together again. Strategic interventions can again be sub-divided into two groups. The first group deals with the management of the organization and its relations to the environment; the second group concerns the transformation of organizations.

Most striking are the *interventions that deliver a new strategy for an organization*. As a result, the organization will start viewing and responding to its environment in a different

manner. The necessity for such an approach often springs from external causes: customers are dissatisfied, they walk away, target groups feel they are not served well, new target groups or new products arrive on the scene. Adapting the strategy then ensures that the organization redefines the relevant environment: what products or services do we deliver to what customers, market or target groups? What systems and technologies do we use to achieve this? What are our work methods, our organization structure and management lines, and what competencies do we need in consequence?

A related way of dealing with the environment is to seek collaboration with other organizations. Such collaboration leads to alliances, partnerships and joint ventures, enabling organizations to fulfill tasks or solve problems that they would be incapable of on their own. This is motivated by strategic reasons, but the forms adopted are highly diverse. The goal can be to arrive at innovations or renewed designs, to achieve collaboration between the private and public sectors, to jointly establish a new market, or to jointly target an existing market. There are various organizational models that can be applied here, but these are not really relevant to this overview.

Finally, there are mergers and take-overs, which see two or more organizations create a single new entity. Aside from issues relating to strategy and leadership, there are financial and legal issues to resolve. However, this is often just the start, soon to be followed by a process of (cultural) integration of the work force and of tasks and responsibilities. And it is not uncommon for things to run into trouble here.

The second group of strategic interventions concerns the *transformation of the organization*.

A strategic culture change is a good example. This intervention helps organizations develop a culture that is suitable to pursuing its strategy. The aim is to cultivate such behavior, values, norms and beliefs that all members of the organization face and work in the same direction. Shared notions of who we are, what we stand for, what we believe in and how we work constitute a solid foundation for the organization.

Another example is the concept of self-direction and self-directing teams or groups. Such interventions help organizations to develop the skill and the capacity to change itself. These are generally highly participative processes in which multiple stakeholders take

part (besides internal parties, also external parties, customers or critical outsiders), with the aim of establishing a strategic direction and to design and implement appropriate structures and processes. Organizations as well as individuals can develop this skill and this capacity, and this intervention lends support.

The notion of learning organizations and knowledge management is closely related to this. This aims to increase an organization's ability to acquire and develop new knowledge. The ultimate goal is to enable the organization to continually improve itself.

Techno-structural interventions target the primary process of an organization, for instance the tasks, or target the work *and* the structure of an organization, as in the division of tasks, the positions or hierarchy. It could concern the design or redesign of work processes and organizational structures, but also arranging the systematic involvement of employees in the redesign process.

The most common intervention is the design of a new organization structure, intended to suit the strategy of the organization and its typical work processes. A vast range of ordering and classification principles are available: functional organizations, unit organizations, multi-dimensional organizations, matrix structures, and so on.

Downsizing is another example of a techno-structural intervention. Here, the aim is to reduce costs and trim down the bureaucracy by reducing the size of the organization. Methods used include employee dismissals, redesigning the organization, or outsourcing. A very different type of techno-structural intervention is aimed at strengthening group autonomy, for example of teams. This intervention attempts to bring information, power, knowledge and rewards onto the work-floor, enabling teams to plan and carry out work processes independently. Ideas about task enrichment, self-direction and quality management are often part of such an intervention.

The goal of *human resource management interventions* (or HRM interventions) is to incorporate and integrate employees in the organization. This will for instance involve performance management: setting targets (also for individuals), appraisals and rewards. It can also involve the selection of personnel, career planning, management development,

dealing with diversity in organizations, and employee satisfaction. The notions that inform such interventions are: integrate people in the organization in a proper and acceptable manner; a satisfied co-worker is a productive co-worker; and, develop the potential and talents of personnel members.

Interventions aimed at performance management consist of setting clear targets that suit the wishes and competencies of the individual and the wishes of the organization; regular reviews of the progress towards achieving those targets; and possibly or if necessary, providing support and assistance and rewarding the realization of the desired performance. This serves to positively stimulate and motivate the employee.

A notable intervention concerns dealing with differences within the organization.

Relevant ideas here range from getting the right person on the right spot to learning how to benefit from differences in qualities, for example between men and women.

Process interventions, lastly, are geared to the people within the organization and how they live and work together in that organization. Common issues here concern communication, problem solving, leadership and team work. The basic aim is to improve how individuals, groups and teams and the organization as a whole function.

Training and coaching programs are popular interventions. These serve to acquire skills and/or insights regarding oneself, others, inter-human relations and working and decision-making in groups and teams. The result is that people and groups become more competent in the work they perform, in tackling problems and in devising alternative solutions.

These interventions are also applied at the organizational level; for instance in the event of urgent problems or in confronting stakeholders in the organization's direct environment. The organization will then swing open all doors and windows, as it were, inviting concerned outsiders to provide feedback and criticism and using that as input to rethink and redesign the organization or certain work processes. Broad involvement throughout the organization will then ensure that everyone understands and accepts this feedback and criticism, increasing the willingness to do something about it.

Another intervention is known as Large Group Interventions. Here, large groups of employees and external stakeholders gather to discuss important wishes and values, to

develop new working methods, and to arrive at a new vision of the future. Such gatherings may involve many hundreds of participants, and they have a powerful impact on the sense of cohesion, of 'family', of identification with the organization. Such gatherings can significantly enhance the general awareness of organizational challenges or opportunities.

5.2 Interventions based on the radical paradigm

According to this paradigm, reality is an objective entity that is dominated by commanding groups and domineering forces that determine and control the definition of reality. The goal is to understand, explain and criticize the structural mechanisms operative in the world of organizations, with the aim of altering these mechanisms through counterforce, resistance and radical change, both individually and collectively. This approach sees organizations as political entities with the associated struggles for power and the dominant conceptions. Whose opinion and whose persuasion prevails? The prime principles are the control over and domination of others. The idea is that, if you don't control and dominate others, then they will control and dominate you. It is, after all, a game of domination or submission, of win or lose. There are no other outcomes. But force triggers counterforce and resistance, which may well lead to a reversal of roles.

Interventions here can be categorized as general interventions, interventions for inter-individual interaction, interventions for groups and organizations and beyond. Examples of each category are offered below.

General interventions are for instance: creating time pressure or a sense of urgency. This involves the ability of one person or party to force another person or party to do or to decide something, ruling out the option of continuing down the existing path.

Another example is to belittle another person or party, to elevate oneself, or to praise someone to the skies. This is a useful way to prepare your position when entering a negotiation process. Ignoring others or, conversely, engaging in a coalition with others are equally useful strategies.

A third example is the deliberate aggravation of a difficult situation; what Karl Marx termed *Verelendung*. As a result, the discontent increases and the desire to challenge those in power grows stronger.

Interventions that can be used to target *inter-individual interaction* include:

Mediation or third-party strategy, in which a mediator or third party attempts to resolve a conflict or serious difference of opinion between individuals through negotiations and mediation. A comparable type of intervention is: have lunch or dinner with your enemy. Learning to deal with resistance put up by others is another popular intervention, which consists of listening to what the other has to say and empathically understanding the resistance. Once the resistance is aired in the open, it is generally possible to conduct a conversation without any resistance.

Some examples of *interventions in groups* are: Divide and rule; ensure that the counterforce or resistance does not become so widespread and collective that it can threaten the incumbent powers.

Use hierarchy and the power of expertise. Deploy people that can say things with authority and with argument that underpin your views. Build coalitions and reach compromises, and create a unified leadership. Speak with one voice; and regularly consult in the backroom to align the message. Make sure you have all key figures and popular persons on board. Appoint a steering group that includes members of all denominations in the organization so that everyone feels represented and no one can claim that their group is not heard.

Examples of interventions at levels beyond the organization are the creation of cartels or the attempt to establish a monopoly; or, to call for strikes or boycotts, to trigger price wars between supermarket chains, or to squeeze small grocers out of the market.

5.3 Interventions based on the humanist paradigm

This paradigm views reality as being subjective. Differences of opinions, contradictions and conflicts are attributed to the plurality of interpretations of reality by different parties.

Change is understood as changing how people think and expanding one's awareness of oneself and the world one inhabits. Learning to understand organizational reality begins with listening to and reflecting on one another's interpretations, and by verbally expressing one's own and other people's perspectives on reality. Emancipation and change can be achieved through critical reflection, evaluating different viewpoints and arguments, in an open dialogue. In the course of that open dialogue, existing meanings and interpretations are transformed into communal and shared meanings. The assumption is that open discussions, based on good will and rational arguments, can lead to consensus about the current and the desired state of the organization.

The prime principles are: viewing organizations from multiple angles, exchanging interpretations from positions of equality, and arriving at shared insights. This results in an increased awareness of oneself and the world one inhabits, and subsequently leads to liberation and emancipation. Here, too, interventions can be categorized in terms of general interventions, interventions aimed at inter-individual interaction, and aimed at groups and organizations.

General interventions are the quest for a dialogue based on equivalence and for communal inquiry. The methods are to listen and talk to each other, making sense in reciprocal relationships based on equality in an ambiance of mutual trust and motivated by positive intentions.

Possible interventions targeting *individuals* are: using self-derision and humor. This introduces disorder within order, without becoming negative or destructive. Putting things into perspective in this way is acceptable to all and provides an instructive moment. Humor also introduces flexibility and leads to adaptation and insight. If you can joke about something it means that you understand it well and that you know your limitations, and that you can press against them without overstepping them.

Other interventions involve learning to look and speak according to different ways of looking and models. Put differently: learning to look at reality through different lenses, so that you repeatedly discover different facets of reality. This actually boils down to learning different bits of language, and so learning to play different language games.

A fine example of an intervention in this area is the mirroring technique. This consists of reflecting back to someone the way he/she comes across and what effect he/she has on others. In this way, one gains a better understanding of oneself, through the eyes of others.

Finally, an example of *interventions for groups and organizations*: developing organizational awareness. Organizational awareness means that you have an understanding of the principles and mechanisms at work in your organization that cause certain patterns to constantly recur. It also implies gaining increasing insight into the underlying causes, as well as into your own role within the whole.

Another intervention consists of working with simulations or games. Through playing an organization game, the participants learn how they work together and alongside each other, what their own preferences and allergies are, and how these can affect the work processes and affect others. As a result, you can learn how to conduct yourself differently and with more awareness, but all players together can also learn to recognize and hence to modify their collective behavior. This is a form of collective learning.

To conclude, a fine example of collective learning is making collective mind-maps or causal diagrams. This entails drawing a map together depicting causes, consequences and relationships within the reality that the group or organization is faced with. The essence of this learning process is, of course, to arrive at agreement and to share and exchange meanings.

5.4 Interventions based on the interpretive paradigm

This is the fourth and last category of interventions. This category will be discussed somewhat more extensively given the fast-growing interest for this category, and because there are currently a number of interesting developments.

Six principles for interventions based on the interpretive paradigm are distinguished (Boontra and De Caluwé, 2007).

First, the makeability of reality is defined in terms of a subject-subject relationship. People want to do things together and they do so in a relationship based on equality. People create the reality that they wish for. This is in contrast to the functionalist paradigm, which focuses on a subject-object relationship, with one change agent that introduces change to others. Here, the object responds as a change agent in its own right.

Second, the interventions are based on positive notions of growth and development and responsibility. People are self-critical, they wish to continually improve, they want to grow. Opportunities to marvel await us at every street corner. People do not shirk their responsibility and do not blame others for the things they themselves think, say or do.

The third principle holds that thinking and acting are strongly intertwined. A person does what he says, and vice versa. Credibility and authentic behavior are important pillars underpinning these interventions. Change is always a collective act. For that reason, it is highly desirable to share the underlying meanings and intentions.

The fourth principle states that change occurs under conditions of freedom, voluntariness and respect. These values are very important for their role in helping people be open to the world around and to respond to opinions and stimuli from around without bias. Without anxiety, they can cope with insecurity and do not shut themselves off.

A fifth principle is that of giving meaning and sense-making. These interventions are pervaded by interaction. Words are the garments of our thoughts, and sometimes it takes a lot of words to discover and communicate these thoughts. The process of sense-making is, for the most part, still poorly understood; we do not know how it works exactly. Yet these interventions do reflect an awareness that sense-making is the most important component of human communication. And that, in the end, this is what truly matters.

The last and sixth principle is that interventions cannot be treated as instruments. An instrumental approach will divorce them from the values and intentions in which they are embedded. Without these, there probably won't be much left of the interventions, and what is left won't have much effectiveness. The individual person that performs the intervention is also a very important factor; if he or she is not credible, the intervention will have zero effect.

Some examples of interventions are offered that suit this social-interpretive paradigm, classified as general interventions, inter-individual interventions, and interventions targeting groups and organizations.

Examples of *general interventions* include:

Performing introspection means searching for and becoming aware of directive opinions within oneself. What are the underlying ideas that shape and steer our actions and our thoughts? This entails investigating one's own inner world and how this world relates to the social reality we create. Values, norms, beliefs and ideologies operate within ourselves and determine what we see, what we consider important, what views we hold, but also determine our blind spots, the things we never think about, and the things we just don't notice.

A related intervention is the analysis of organizational realities using causal charts. Through interviews, people's stories are recorded and then analyzed by applying the following questions: What are the dominant realities that I encounter here? Which lines of reasoning (the causal charts) underlie these realities? How are those lines of reasoning preserved? And finally: how do these lines of reasoning function in the process of sense-

making within the group or organization? The causal charts can provide insight into how particular realities are constructed within a specific context. How does this then impact on the behavior of an individual or of a group? Clearly, making and repeatedly checking the causal charts is a labor-intensive job that requires an open-minded and unprejudiced attitude on the part of the maker. The charts reveal how the process of sense-making works in people and in organizations.

Interventions at the level of *individuals* are, for example, working with stories or narratives. This approach is based on the assumption that every individual tries to make sense of his life through the stories that he constructs during the course of his life; stories about himself but also about others. These stories consist of memories mixed with other bits of information in diverse forms: texts, sound, anecdotes, visual images or scripts. Stories play a significant role in socialization and enculturalization: the culture of a group or organization is transferred from one person to the next. Stories can also fulfill a function in a transition period by recounting how things were, and forecasting how things are going to be. Stories can also be important to experiencing the here-and-now, and can, finally, also be a powerful resource in creating a new reality.

An example of intervening in *groups or organizations* is 'open space'. The main underlying principle here is self-organization, that is, the process by which structures emerge within a chaotic system, seemingly spontaneously. However, those structures only become clear during or after a process of open space. That is why such processes are difficult to predict. The things that most concern the participants, and the associated themes or issues that are essential to them, emerge only gradually. The essence of the process is to create open space around a meaningful issue, which allows for much interaction and exchange.

Another example is what is termed Learning History. This intervention assumes that people first need to organize their collective memory and to discuss and exchange that history, to identify the red threads that run throughout, to then determine how to create a new future on the basis of this past. Through interviews and documents, a team can construct a story about the past which is then presented to new dialogue partners. In this

way, multiple voices are heard and a plurality of perspectives on and experiences of that past are addressed, allowing all participants to contribute to the process with the goal of recounting a history that does justice to all the various perspectives and to the perceptions and emotions and all differences encountered therein. It is assumed that, if people perform this process properly, they will develop a collective memory of where we came from and what we went through. This should then make it easier and more organic to talk about where we are now and where we are headed. Referring to this method, it is sometimes said that it enables us to stand on the shoulders of our forerunners and to continue building on the past.

A related approach is that of Appreciative Inquiry. This intervention attempts to discover the vital forces that feed an organization's existence. It calls on the art of appreciation and of the positive approach, and on the art of discovering the factors and actors that give life to a group or organization. This method consists of four phases: Discovering what gives life; dreaming of what we can be and want to be; devising the ideal; and determining how we can get moving forward and how we can learn and develop as we go.

6. Conclusion of this article

In this article our understanding of intervening and interventions, and how interventions fit within the entirety of a change strategy is described. A wide range of interventions, categorized in terms of three dimensions is listed and briefly discussed: first, in terms of the object of the intervention, being the individual, group, organization or network of organizations; and second, in terms of the colors of change, with an emphasis on the operative principles of the interventions. Lastly, interventions were discussed from the perspective of four mental patterns and paradigms. The goal has been to provide an overview of the range of intervention options, and to introduce the change agent to interventions that may be less familiar or less favored. The important point is to understand that interventions are based on underlying mental patterns and that there are significant differences between interventions with respect to their operative principles, their approach, their concept of the human individual, their method and underlying values, norms and beliefs. With this awareness, change agents should now have sufficient ground to make well-informed choices for specific interventions within a coherent intervention plan.

How can management consultants and the clients of management consultants become aware about their favorite ways of thinking and problem solving? And how can they change these preferences?

First of all by knowing and by becoming aware. If you only know a limited set of interventions and you do not know alternative ways to intervene, you will not use these in practice. And how can you know? By reading this article for instance or by learning it through lessons or narratives.

Secondly, there are reliable tests for the color-thinking. This questionnaire can be found on internet: ww.tg.nl or ww.decaluwe.nl. It is a twelve item test with a forced-choice methodology.

Thirdly be using 180 degree or 360 degree feedback by colleagues or critical friends. They can make you aware about your preferences, about your favorite ways of thinking,

about your implicit assumptions and about your blind spots. This awareness might then be a starting point for developing a new set of interventions and intervening. Try to do it in another way. Or ask other people with different skills en competencies to help or to assist you.

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