Conclusions on Interventions for Cultural Change

In this chapter, I summarize the use of interventions used by leaders in cultural change. First, I examine the use of interactive and meaningful interventions. Then, I look at structural and learning interventions. Power and conflict interventions are also elucidated. I then consider the relationship between interventions and change strategies. Finally, I discuss possibilities to combine interventions and focus on the art of choosing an effective mix of interventions.

Interactive Interventions for Deep Change

In companies that successfully change their culture, mostly people who have a leading role in the cultural change choose interactive interventions. It does not matter what the motive is for the cultural change. Interactive interventions are useful and valuable in episodic cultural change in crisis situations and for gradual cultural development that allows companies to qualify for the future and increase their customer value. It also does not matter which sectors the organizations operate in. The interventions are used in profit organizations, service companies, knowledge industry, care institutions and government services. It is clear that interactive interventions can be used across a broad range of situations.

Interactive interventions are intended to bring people together so they can exchange pictures, interpret their situations, develop a shared vision

and undertake communal action to bring about renewal. Interactive interventions also stimulate people to search together for the underlying values that guide their behaviour. The interventions affect the values and basic assumptions of an organization. When values change, it is about people knowing each other and a certain basis of trust arising in each other and in the future.

Meaningful Interventions to Guide Change

Meaningful interventions are also used a great deal in cultural change. Here too, the reason for cultural change and the sector the organization operates in do not make any difference. The interventions can be applied widely and leaders in cultural change often use them. Leaders in cultural change use these interventions to envision the future. They guide the change, tackle people about their ambitions and they tempt others to participate and work on the future together.

Meaningful interventions assume that people who talk and work with each other give meaning together to the reality in which they live. From those pictures of reality, people take the initiative to have meaning. Meaningful interventions aim at organizing meetings at which people search for the meaning of their work, the meaning of working together and the meaning of the company they work for. It is usually top managers who initiate meaningful interventions. It concerns providing guidance through the use of core values, stories, artefacts and symbols that reflect the values of the company. It is also about giving space to others to be meaningful themselves. Giving space mainly occurs in organizations where many professionals work. Guiding the meaning of a company and giving professionals space to be of meaning can aim at the organization as a whole and permeate through all levels of the organization.

Structural Interventions to Reinvent Business Processes

In organizations that understand the rules of the market, leaders regularly choose structural and instrumental interventions. They are interventions that affect structures, systems and work patterns directly. This concerns the indirect influence of behaviour through drastic changes to the context in

which people do their work. The structural and instrumental interventions are based on the idea that people allow their behaviour to be guided by structures and systems and by the rewarding of behaviour. It is striking that leaders in cultural change do not use large-scale cultural programmes that concentrate one-sidedly on behavioural change. Only one company chose this intervention and that choice resulted in a lot of opposition and conflict. Large-scale cultural programmes appear to be senseless for really changing a culture.

Learning Interventions for Continuous Change

In organizations where many professionals work, leaders in cultural change often use learning interventions. Learning interventions invite people to experiment with renewal and to learn from that. This fits in with the professional attitude of professionals and that makes these interventions meaningful and effective in professional environments. The learning interventions are not isolated and are always connected to interactive and meaningful interventions. Meaningful interventions guide the learning process. The learning process itself is often implemented as an interactive activity.

The learning interventions are not training programmes or standard courses as can be seen in cultural programmes that focus exclusively on behavioural change. Those training programmes usually result only in good intentions and cynicism among the employees. With learning interventions, it is about learning processes that focus on what is needed and desirable and in which people search, on the basis of their professionalism, for new working methods and methods of cooperation. New working methods with associated values arise from these experiences and they contribute to the person's own professional identity and the identity of the organization.

Power and Conflict Interventions to Make Space

Power interventions are used sparingly when changing an organization's culture. These interventions are often chosen by top managers in businesses that are under pressure or in a state of crisis. If they use power interventions, it is mainly to give direction and create space for renewal by breaking through old working patterns. Power interventions are never used

on their own. They go together with interactive, meaningful and structural interventions but rarely with learning interventions.

Conflict interventions are used to make space for renewal or pay attention to emotions and repair the damage that arose during the episodic changing of the organizational culture. Conflict interventions have a moderating effect in power interventions and are almost always linked to interactive and meaningful interventions.

Combining Interventions

The observations discussed earlier show a great deal about the use of interventions. Hard and soft interventions are almost always combined. Choosing interventions is related to the reason for a cultural change. In crisis situations and with episodic cultural change, harder interventions are chosen, such as power interventions and the structural and instrumental interventions. Conflict interventions are then needed to restore trust. With gradual cultural development, soft interventions are chosen more readily, such as interactive, meaningful and learning interventions. Conflict interventions are needed to make space by attacking sacred cows or making it possible to talk about obstacles. Companies that are successful in cultural change never choose power interventions or structural or instrumental interventions exclusively. The interactive and meaningful interventions are leading. Interventions are never an isolated occurrence but are made up of a well-considered mix of several interventions. In addition, the interventions fit in with the chosen change strategy.

Interventions and Change Strategies

Choosing interactive and meaningful interventions matches the gradual and interactive change strategy described in Part 2 of this book. Power interventions correspond with the power strategy, and the structural and instrumental interventions match the planned strategy. The conflict interventions go well with the negotiating strategy. Learning interventions match the learning strategy well for changing and help in anchoring the cultural change. For successful cultural change in organizations, it is essential to ensure that the mix of interventions corresponds with the reasons for change and the aim of the change process. Coherence
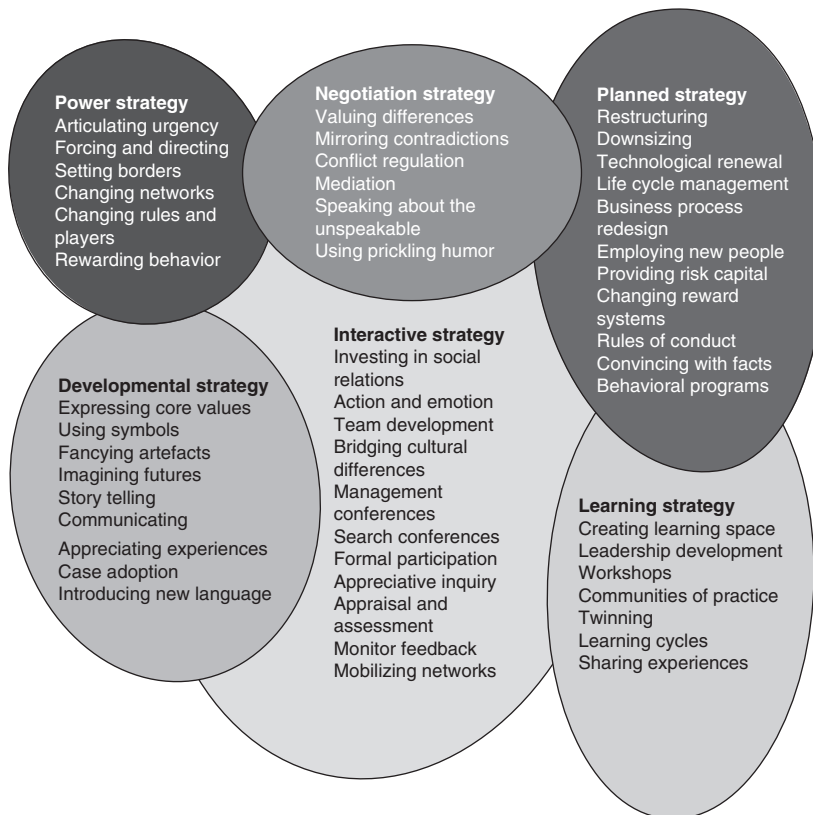
Power strategy
Articulating urgency
Forcing and directing
Setting borders
Changing networks
Changing rules and
players
Rewarding behavior

Negotiation strategy
Valuing differences
Mirroring contradictions
Conflict regulation
Mediation
Speaking about the
unspeakable
Using prickling humor

Planned strategy
Restructuring
Downsizing
Technological renewal
Life cycle management
Business process
redesign
Employing new people
Providing risk capital
Changing reward
systems
Rules of conduct
Convincing with facts
Behavioral programs

Developmental strategy
Expressing core values
Using symbols
Fancying artefacts
Imagining futures
Story telling
Communicating

Appreciating experiences
Case adoption
Introducing new language

Interactive strategy
Investing in social
relations
Action and emotion
Team development
Bridging cultural
differences
Management
conferences
Search conferences
Formal participation
Appreciative inquiry
Appraisal and
assessment
Monitor feedback
Mobilizing networks

Learning strategy
Creating learning space
Leadership development
Workshops
Communities of practice
Twinning
Learning cycles
Sharing experiences

Figure 23.1   Correspondence of change strategy and interventions.

between the chosen change strategy and the intervention mix reduces the
uncertainty of people in the company and contributes to a robust change
strategy. That is why looking for correspondence is an important point
for attention for leaders in cultural change who strive towards increasing
customer value.

Figure 23.1 shows a correspondence between the chosen change strategy
and interventions that suit it well. The size of the balls corresponds with
the frequency of the application in the interventions. The more the balls
are in the foreground, the more explicitly visible the interventions are in
their use.

Successful cultural change mainly involves meaningful interventions
that are used in combination with a developmental, learning and

transformational change strategy. If the continued existence of the organization is at risk, structural interventions in a planned strategy can also be chosen. The interventions that suit a power and negotiation strategy are rarely used and do not appear to have much effect for cultural change. It is striking that the most-used interventions affect the identity and business idea of an organization directly.

Effective Intervention Mix

The question of how effective interventions are also plays a part when choosing interventions. The following guidelines are useful for arriving at an effective choice:

- Before choosing interventions that affect the culture of an organization, as much information and factual material must be gathered as possible. This consists of indisputable facts and telling examples that show why things can no longer go on the way they are.
- Successive interventions must connect to each other so that they form a logical whole and leaders in cultural change can maximize the effectiveness of a set of interventions.
- Interventions are efficient if leaders in cultural change do not perform any unnecessary interventions and take into consideration organizational resources such as time, effort and money.
- To achieve episodic cultural change, interventions are performed in a short period of time. For cultural development, the period for the sequence of interventions must not be too long.
- Interventions that aim at clarifying the mission and identity of the company are usually the first ones thought of. Meaningful interventions can be useful in this. A good follow-up step is the articulation of an attractive picture of the future and concretization of the strategic course. Interactive interventions can help to concretize the strategic course. With drastic cultural change, it is obvious to tackle the work practices by changing structures and technology using functional interventions.
- The entirety of interventions must have has few dysfunctional effects as possible, such as uncertainty, unfulfilled expectations or psychological damage to individuals.
- The interventions tie in with the overarching change strategy and the experience of the people who take the initiative in a cultural change.

This also concerns the suitability for one's own role and own formal position within the business.

- Leaders in cultural change continually monitor the effectiveness of interventions and if necessary, choose a different intervention mix if the existing mix does not contribute sufficiently to the change in the organizational culture and the intended objectives of the change.

Choosing an Effective Intervention Mix

Choosing an optimum intervention mix depends every time on the situation the company is in and the phase of the cultural change. It is about balancing between interventions. The practice of the companies in this study can give a few handholds for arriving at a mix:

- Interventions match the choice for an episodic cultural change or a gradual cultural development. With episodic cultural change, hard interventions are logical for the early phase. Cultural development is more suited to soft interventions.
- Hard interventions on their own are not enough to realize a cultural change. Power interventions can help in getting people moving, while meaningful interventions take care of enticement to get people involved. Interactive interventions create commitment in the change and provide a support base.
- Hard interventions are always combined with meaningful and interactive interventions. Soft interventions are good for combining too. Sometimes, you need to make space for soft interventions by using power, saying how things are and drawing boundaries and by articulating what is no longer acceptable.
- Interventions correspond with the chosen change approach. This correspondence reduces uncertainty about the cultural change, gives the people concerned clarity about the direction of the change and contributes to the confidence that the change is desirable and feasible.
- It is important that there is correspondence in the intervention mix. Nevertheless, it is possible to switch between hard and soft interventions. In crisis situations, leaders often start with an episodic cultural change and hard interventions. They switch at a later phase to cultural development and more soft interventions. Leaders who choose for cultural development and soft interventions are

willing to switch at a certain moment to hard interventions such as a change of players if the current players are not capable of making the soft interventions effective.

- Communicating about the change strategy and the interventions, making the progress visible and celebrating successes provide support to the cultural change and the chosen change strategy and intervention mix.

People who take the initiative to change the culture of their organization will find that there are many more interventions available. The interventions described come from the real-life situations of nineteen companies that worked successfully on cultural change. They are a source of experience and ideas that can inspire others to make a success of the cultural change in their own organization. Given a specific situation, the art is in arriving at a consistent combination of interventions that match the reason for the change and the overarching change strategy.