An Essay on Project Management in Organisational Change
"Feelings are the Motive Power, Reason is the Rudder"
Ry Nielsen, Jens Carl; Ry, Morten

Document Version
Final published version

Publication date:
2003

License
CC BY-NC-ND

Citation for published version (APA):
Ry Nielsen, J. C., & Ry, M. (2003). *An Essay on Project Management in Organisational Change: "Feelings are the Motive Power, Reason is the Rudder"*.

Link to publication in CBS Research Portal

Working Paper

No. 2003.9

J.C. Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry

An Essay on Project Management in
Organisational Change

J. C. Ry Nielsen, Copenhagen Business School (ry.ioa@cbs.dk)
Morten Ry, Partner, Deloitte Business Consulting, Copenhagen
(mry@deloitte.dk)

2nd Annual International Conference on Leadership Research
Lancaster University, December 15-16, 2003

An Essay on

Project Management in Organisational Change

"Feelings Are the Motive Power, Reason Is the Rudder"[1]

2nd Edition
9 December 2003

---

[1] Poul Henningsen (1894-1967), Danish architect, lamp designer, and cultural radical

Introduction

In this essay we will demonstrate that the role of project management in organisational change processes is a mixture of rational and non-rational features. It is also colourful, difficult, interesting, and messy.

We have named the paper "An Essay on". An essay means treating a topic freely from different angles, although not forgetting the sources you use[2]. The implication of this is that we are not able or willing to make an encompassing study of the literature on project management[3]. We thus know that many angles will not be covered. Furthermore we do not intend a make a negative delineation, indicating what we are not dealing with. We prefer to make a positive delineation, emphasising what we are going to take up in our essay.

Positively phrased we are inspired by 3 sources that will make the foundation for our different angles:

1. Decision making theory (Enderud,1976)[4]. One of the authors has previously with success applied decision-making theory as an approach for analysing organisation change processes [5]. Both authors have followed the same line in analysing organisational changes in the Danish public sector[6]. That success has inspired us to re-use the distinction between rational, political and anarchic processes in this essay [7]. Enderud (1976:21-22) excludes explicitly the role of the actors' participation in his presentation of decision models. We find, however this aspect so important that we have decided to include it

2. Buchanan and Boddy´s analysis of the character of change[8]: The authors characterise the change project in to dimensions. One pertains to the activities concerned: Are we dealing with peripheral or core activities of the organisation. The second dimension deals with the magnitude of the change. Buchanan and Boddy use the scale: incremental - radical[9]. Furthermore Buchanan and Boddy makes a useful distinction between "public performance" (on stage) of rationally considered and logically phased and visibly participative change and "backstage activity" in the recruitment and maintenance of support and in seeking and blocking resistance (ibid p.27)

3. We will apply data from our own case studies. We will use a format that we call an illustration, thereby indicating that we "only" illustrate a point. We do not prove it[10]. Our cases are almost all from the public sector or from trade unions. Most of them have been published elsewhere.

---

[2] The essay format was first conceptualised by the French thinker Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592), *Essays 1-3,* København: Gyldendal 1998. Essay has its roots in the French verb "essayer", which means to try

[3] A search on Alexa.com gives 3.170.000 entries on project management, and shows that that the Project Management Institute has 113.000 members all over the world. (30.09.03)

[4] The best overview is still to be found in Harald Enderud, Beslutninger i organisationer, København, Fremad 1976

[5] J. F. Bakka & J. C. Ry Nielsen, *Organisationsændringer- en procesorienteret fremstilling* in Jesper Strandgård Petersen (ed), Artikler til organisationsteori, Samfundslitteratur:København 1992

[6] J.C. Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry, The Danish Public Sector- an Endless Journey of Organisational Change, *Papers in Organisation No 45*, Copenhagen Business School 2002a

[7] See footnote no 4

[8] David Buchanan & David Boddy, *The Expertise of the Change Agent,* Prentice Hall 1991

[9] In Boddy & Buchanan, *Taking the Lead,* Prentice Hall 1992 the authors have exchanged incremental with familiar, and radical with novel, without changing the content.

[10] We have previously applied this method: J.C. Ry Nielsen, *Et essay om livet i bureaukratier og andre centralistiske organisationer,* Harvard Børsen 1989

Our Approach

As a first step we will look at Buchanan and Boddy's line of reasoning because it is central to our analysis.

Second we will go into details with the rational, political, anarchic and participatory models:

- Delineating the content
- Transferring the content to change processes and project management
- Utilising the Buchanan and Boddy chain of reasoning and our case stories

Buchanan and Boddy

The Significance of Change for the Organisation

In this paragraph we will look closer at Buchanan and Boddy's frame of reference, because it is simple and yet very meaningful to us[11][12]. As mentioned above Buchanan and Boddy distinguish between changes in core and peripheral activities.

The core activities are the same as the primary tasks of the organisation, its raison d'être. The peripheral are support activities[13].

The chain of reasoning is that the more central a given activity is the more difficult it is to change it. The opposite goes for support activities. It is much easier to outsource cleaning or the operation of a canteen than to change a research institution into a teaching organisation. In the latter case peoples' self-perception, the organisation's values, and power structure are affected. That will inevitably create turmoil in the organisation.

But deciding on the degree of centrality of a given activity is not only an academic and analytical matter. It is also a political question, where interests are at work and conflicts arise. Everybody - except the cleaning and canteen employees - would quickly agree that canteen and cleaning activities are peripheral, indicating that not much influence and power are connected with them. But take an organisation where a new order of priorities will change the established dominant coalition, for instance by allocating more resources to user oriented activities. Here we should expect many power struggles and use of coercion.

The Magnitude of Change

As mentioned above Buchanan and Boddy talk of incremental and radical changes[14]. Applying the Leavitt – Ry model as a distinguisher we can see a lot of incremental changes in organisations[15].

- Appointing the associate city manager to city manager
- Exchanging PC programmes each year
- Expanding a department with a few people
- The gradual replacement of personnel

---

[11] David Buchanan & David Boddy, *The Expertise of the Change Agent*, Prentice Hall International 1992
[12] Ry Nielsen & Ry (2002 a) op.cit.
[13] Buchanan & Boddy. 1992 p.41
[14] The founding father to incremental change is Charles Lindblom who has coined " disjoined incrementalism" and "muddling through", cf Charles Lindblom, *The Science of Muddling Through,* Public Administrative Review vil XIX, Spring 1959
[15] J.C: Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry, *Anderledes tanker om Leavitt – en klassiker i ny belysning,* København: Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne 2002, also in Ry Nielsen & Ry (2002a) op.cit where the examples are taken from

- Office exchanges
- "New Pay" that only deals with 1% of the total pay.

It is worth pointing out, however that it is only from a holistic view that these changes are incremental.
- For the person, who gets appointed it may the success of his life
- Getting phased out because of new technology may be a personal disaster
- Being moved from a big office to a small one may represent a real loss of status
- Getting the first personal big addition in pay may be a real victory to the person in question

At the micro level we would in all cases talk about a radical change.

From a holistic view radical changes occur with more dramatic changes in the variables of the model
- When the role of the school administration changes from one of controlling to one of consulting
- When pay negotiations are moved from central administration to the individual organisation
- When top management is exchanged in a short time period
- When the concept of teaching is transformed from lecturing in large classes to discussion workshops

These radical changes are in the short run difficult to change back. They may turn out to be irreversible. Some of them pertain to the core activities. Those changes we will call strategic[16].

Radical changes will always be referred to as significant, huge, or unique. But it worth noticing that many radical changes are not as radical as they are talked about[17].

We have seen the building of a new city hall, claimed to be of great significance to the organisation. But except for the physical structure nothing much happens. Tasks, division of labour, the power structure, the technology, and the reward system – all remain the same. This could be true of most of the discussion in Denmark. There seems to be a tendency to claim radical changes in many cases where the management structure is changed, but not the daily operations. Ninety per cent of the employees are performing exactly the same job as before.

Public Performance and Backstage Activities

Buchanan and Boddy emphasise that the change agent must be able to combine the public rational performance with backstage activities (ibid pp. 27-31). We will shortly elaborate on the backstage activities. Buchanan and Boddy identify three categories of backstaging activities, which they illustrate with examples (ibid pp. 130-136). We will follow them by showing the categories and giving one example for each category.
1. Manipulating structures: "The timing of structural changes is often significant. You may have to wait until someone leaves or retires or is "creatively promoted" o another part of the organisation. These creative departures are, of course, then replaced by known supporters of the change"

---

[16] Buchanan & Boddy, op.cit p. 42
[17] J.C. Ry Nielsen, *Hvide elefanter og grå katte i mørket,* IP-Information, december 1004

2. Manipulating relationships: "Tell those who would block your proposals that senior managers are on your side and that in challenging you they are challenging them. And remind them if appropriate when their next performance appraisal and salary review are scheduled and who will be conducting these".
3. Manipulating language: "Word proposals for change in such a way that they can be seen to fit with current values and ideals. They are more difficult to challenge if they fit like this"

Buchanan and Boddy notice that these approaches have to be used with tact and in context. Used cynically out of context they will clearly fail (ibid p.135)

Rational Models

According to Enderud (1976: 30-51) we usually operate with two rational models in decision-making theory. One is based on "Economic Man" assumptions, the other on "Administrative Man" assumptions.
The distinction has to with the difference between optimising and satisficing.
The Economic Man wants the best of all worlds, while the "Administrative Man" knows that we do not have enough information and information handling capacity to get that, so he is satisfied with more modest results, e.g. an increase in 10% in productivity of the surgery.

But the two models have an important feature in common. They believe in goals, they are very much content oriented. They will persistently hunt alternatives that can fill out discrepancies between goals and actual results.

It is also an assumption of the models that we know the results of our effort, that is a cause- effect relationship. We can without problems relate alternatives to consequences and thereby goals and values.

This goal and content orientation is predominant in most of the rhetoric on organisational change. When the assumptions are fulfilled it is certainly an excellent idea to apply them and most probably the "Administrative Man" model.

Goal setting, milestones, and evaluation according to the goals are the main elements in the rational models of project management[18]. According to the Project Management Institute a project can be defined as "a temporary endeavour undertaken to create a unique product or service".[19]

---

[18] In Denmark we have a bible concerned with this aspect: Mikkelsen & Riis, Projekledelse, 7. ed København 2003, first edtion 1981
[19] Project Management Institute, Standards Committee, A guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, Upper Darby, 1996

> **Illustration**
> **1. The history of project management**[20]
> The evolution of project management tools began in the USA in the weapons development industries in the 40s and 50s. The US Department of Defense and NASA were important in the development process of tools such as network planning and control and had their suppliers use the tools as well. Most important was the development of PERT – Program Evaluation and Review Technique – developed in 1957 to control and evaluate continuously the progress of large, complex development projects. From there on the project management techniques spread and a number of tools were developed, including the Critical Paths Method by DuPont in the late 50s. Later on many large companies developed their own procedures and by now a large field of text books exist. Most of which is rather practical in nature reflecting the operational nature of the field.

The argument of the rational models goes like this:

Planned change in an organization unfolds in a logically sequenced manner. Projects are planned in phases to obtain clear and measurable goals. Specific solutions are not identified until the problem has been clearly defined. An effective solution is not selected until the various options have been systematically analysed, compared and evaluated against the predefined goals. Implementation does not begin until there is agreement on the solution. The project is planned with milestones and deadlines and the key actors in the implementation process each have clearly specified tasks and responsibilities. The progress of implementation is systematically monitored and deviations from plan are corrected. The implementation process is bounded in terms of both resources (manpower and money) and time with a clear termination date. The logic, which unfolds in this approach, is the logic of rational problem solving.

Content and control is on the agenda in this perspective. I.e. focus on the content of the change effort using problem solving techniques and control over the process using project management techniques.

> **Illustrations**
> **2. Milestone model - example**[21]
> The figure below illustrates a high level milestone model. As can be seen the project has been divided into 5 steps starting with data collection and ending with evaluation. The project is planned to last 1½ year.

---

[20] This illustration has been built from Blomquist & Söderholm, "How Project Management Got Carried Away" in Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm (eds), Beyond Project Management – New perspectives on the temporary – permanent dilemma, Malmö, 2002

[21] Andersen, Povl Anker, J.C. Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry, Ændringsprocesser i Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund - Strategi, overraskelser og ledelse, MPA Working Paper no. 10, København 2000

SL Milestone Model
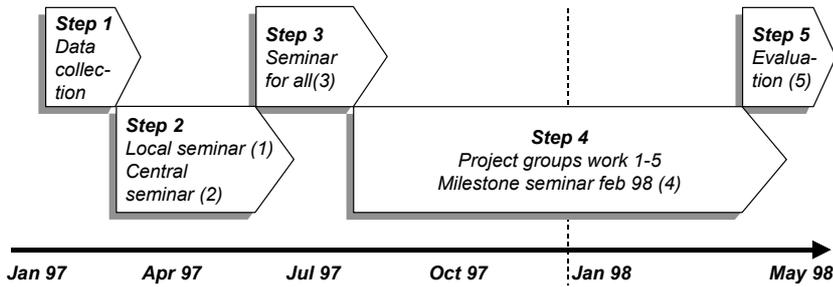
3. The good control of activities and timing
According to Mikkelsen & Riis the following characterises a good control of activities and timing:[22]

- The project is structured phase by phase
- Plans are laid in levels (time horizon and level of detail)
- Milestones are incorporated in the plan
- Uncertainty has been uncovered and the project is prepared to meet uncertainty
- The milestone plan has been made visible
- Loyalty towards the plan exist
- Project members have plan in their own work
- The execution of the plan is monitored closely
- Project management is focused on problems and decisions
- Deviations are shown and former project plans have been saved
- Closing activities and milestone that have been reached are celebrated

The rational model permeates the business world. On stage we are expected to follow the rational models no matter which kind of change; radical or incremental – core or peripheral.[23] The rational model seems to be the right and only one on most stages. Thus the governing discourse on project management is rational. Especially when plans are made before kick off, the rational model dominates and the most legitimate way to start a project is to present project management structures and milestone plans. This rationale fits with a general management rationale, which is one of control. It seems to become a self self-reinforcing circle whereby management demands it, consultants supply it and everybody adheres to it and thereby reinforcing the notion of the "Good Project" as defined by clear goals, milestones, evaluation etc.

The model is indisputably correct when we are talking about large engineering projects based on numerous calculations and built-up explicit knowledge. The building of a bridge. Construction of a cement factory. That is in those cases where the uncertainty can be reduced dramatically by thinking and calculation everything trough from the outset. However, that is exactly why this approach is dangerous to lean solely on in organisation change project because uncertainty will always be abundant and unpredictable.

---

[22] Mikkelsen & Riis, Grundbog i projektledelse, Rungsted, 2002
[23] Buchanan & Boddy 1992

Political models

Enderud (1976, p.76-100) operates with the following assumptions for political models:

- A manageable number of decision makers, organised in fractions
- The parties know what they want to obtain. They have relatively well defined goals.
- The goals are partly, but not completely conflicting, thereby leaving room for bagaining

Enderud further makes a distinction between two political models. One is concerned with compromises on means, the other with compromises on goals.

In both cases the power position, coalition forming, and the negotiation abilities of the involved parties are very important to achieve a decision. In the most successful cases both accept and legitimacy are obtained.

In project management terms the political dimension is often very crucial. Many change projects involve change of power positions, reallocation of resources, appointments, hiring, and firing.

All of which implies that many interests are at stake. But also many feelings may come forward, too. They may stretch from joy and enthusiasm from those who benefit to anxiety, fear, jealousy, and disbelief from those who do not benefit.

Using the concepts from Buchanan and Boddy it is obvious that the more radical and concerning core activities the change efforts are the more political the process becomes implying the necessity of many backstage activities..

In Denmark some political processes in public organisations are institutionalised by way of joint committees, which often function as steering committees for organisational change projects. Some, but not all of the politicking is hereby put on stage. We experience, too that political processes are fairly commonly accept as part of a typical organisations' life. Furthermore we know that some of the political process backstage are commonly accepted and known. These activities do not have the reprehensible character as in many other countries. Back stage activities are to some extent legitimate and expected, i.e. institutionalised. The part for many backstage activities is openly known so to speak. Roles are played according to the part.

Illustrations
5. From separate to joint effort.
SL[24] (a trade union) had a change project concerning the relationships and resource allocation between the central and local units. The problems involved are wicked, i.e. unsolvable. SL had hired two consultants (the authors) to facilitate the expected difficult process. The consultants implemented a process, where the central and local units first met separately to state their points of views.[25] Then a joint seminar followed, where the differences and similarities gave rise to many joint project groups

---

[24] Andersen, Povl Anker, J.C. Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry, Ændringsprocesser i Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund - Strategi, overraskelser og ledelse, MPA Working Paper no. 10, København 2000
[25] The rationale behind this process design was inspired by Bjørn Gustavsen (1991), *Strategier for utvikling i arbeidslivet*, Oslo: Tanum

6. From sparring to steering

Before the process started we proposed and got a group as a sparring group to secure relevance and legitimacy. The group consisted of politicians from both central and local units. Differing opinions were thus represented. Besides the head of the central secretariat participated. The group did not function well, however. Too many conflicts among the members of the group and hidden agendas meant that the consultants were not challenged enough and in that way became too powerful. At the above mentioned joint seminar s the consultants therefore suggested that the sparring group should be replaced by a steering committee taking over the project from the consultants. The consultants also suggested that another –more charismatic and popular- politician should replace the president of the union in the committee. Finally we suggested that the deputy head should replace the head of the secretariat.

The suggestions were all accepted, thereby avoiding discussing the latent conflicts and hidden agendas. The steering committee took over and only rarely used the consultants.

7. Stakeholder analysis

In SL they had a discussion on the composition of project groups and steering committees. After a lecture on the stakeholder model[26], it was decided to apply the model whenever projects were started. A very simple edition of the model was implemented. The stakeholders should be categorised according to the following figure

		Strength of stakeholders concerning the project	
		Big	Small
Expected Reaction	Positive		
	Indifferent		
	Negative		

The crucial question is of course how to treat people with big, but negative strength. From a co-optation point of view you should have them participate.[27] The implication being that it is easier to influence people, when they are close to you, instead of having them criticise the project from outside.

---

[26] James March & Herbert Simon, (1958) Organizations, N.Y. John Wiley Bakka, Jørgen Frode, Interessentmodellens udvikling in Per Olof Berg & Flemming Poulfeldt (eds), Ledelseslæren i Norden, Dafolo Forlag, 1998 Frederikshavn 1998

[27] On the mechanisms of co-optation see Philip Selznik (1949) TVA and the Grass Roots, Berkeley and Los Angeles:University of California Press

Anarchic Models

Enderud (1976: 100-123) operates with the following assumptions for the anarchic models:

- Goals and objectives are unclear formulated, inconsistent, conflicting or changing over time within the same decision
- Means-ends relations (technology) are unclear i.e. we do not know what comes out of our efforts, even if we have clear cut objectives
- Many and part –time participants implying that coordination gets more complicated and that participants have other inter interests that they will pursue at the same time, participating in other decision processes.

When these assumptions are fulfilled the anarchic models can be viewed as appropriate in change processes

Enderud operates with two anarchic models. One is Lindblom's "Muddling Through"- model, the other being Cohen, March and Olsen's "Garbage Can" model[28].

Bakka and Ry Nielsen in their article relabelled the two models[29]. When talking to public managers they found that even though the managers behaved as described in the models, they hated the idea of "disjointed incrementalism" and "muddling through". This was far away from their self-perception as rationally thinking managers. They did not like the connotations to a "Garbage Can", either. Emptying garbage cans (dustbins) is a low status job in Denmark.

As a consequence Bakka and Ry Nielsen labelled Lindblom's model "The Trial and Error Model". The garbage can model was renamed "The Opportunity Model". At the same time the authors simplified the content, because they were interested in "selling" the models as legitimate, normative models of change, when assumptions were fulfilled. We will follow Bakka and Ry Nielsen's labelling

The Trial and Error Model[30]

In the condensed form Lindblom's model contains the following elements:

- You move away from evils, not towards goals
- Incremental changes are preferred
- Means define goals
- Changes are a trial and error process

Content or goals are not important. They play no significant role. Problems and process are key factors. The learning aspect combined with a reflective element is also important. As we do not know what the results of our efforts will be, it is more intelligent to behave incrementally.

---

[28] Lindblom, op. cit. Michael Cohen, James March & Johan P. Olsen, *A garbage can model of organizational choice* Administrative Science Quartely, March 1972. The model is presented more "giving" in James March, Skraldespandsmodeller af beslutningstagen i organisationer in J. March, *Fornuft og forandring*, København 1995, Samfundslitteratur , p. 87-119 .

[29] Bakka & Ry Nielsen, op.cit. p. 53-57

[30] A direct tanslation from Danish would be "search and learn model"

Quinn has expanded the model by saying that although we might not have clear-cut goals we often have a direction in which we want to move. Quinn therefore talks about "logical incrementalism" or incrementalism with a purpose[31].

Looking at one episode of change this is naturally a very conservative way of thinking. But if we see it as many episodes, we are close to continuous change and learning[32].
"Action Learning" in its essence also builds on these ideas[33].
As "every little helps" one might argue that the participants come to experience new perspectives on their organisations and in this way have "double loop learning in the Argyris-Schön way[34]. We argue that a lot of "single loop learning" can lead to double loop learning, if the participants reflect on their experience. This reasoning is not, however, in line with Argyris and Schön, but it follows the old Marxist viewpoint on the transformation of quantities to quality. (Boiling water turns into steam).

Summing up, we will say that this approach to change in the public is both vital and able to deliver results starting with a process perspective.

Illustrations

8. Great plans - small results[35]
In the municipality of Copenhagen one of the elected mayors – a female radical leftist wanted to decentralise one the agencies. The agency and especially the top civil servant opposed the idea, but had to accept a project group with an external consultant associated (the senior author of this paper). It quickly turned out that for many practical reasons the great plans were impossible to implement. Instead the project group concentrated its work on small-scale improvements of procedures and structure. These efforts were rather successful, and the antagonistic attitudes from the early phases of the project were eased out.

Concerning decentralisation the group came forward with three not very encompassing proposals that were discussed at a seminar for all employed in the agency. The proposals, however, were turned down. The old conflict between the mayor and the top manager had not been treated thoroughly enough, although the consultant believed that he had made a lot of backstage activities.

9. We try again[36]
In the change processes in SL the management group has been in focus for the last seven years.

During the first phase of the Carlo change project it was agreed upon that the group should play a more significant role in the organisation. The group, however, quickly turned out to be too diversified in its composition. It was therefore split into two smaller groups, one with professional

---

[31] James B. Quinn, *Strategies for Change: Logical Incrementalism,* in Henry Mintzberg & James B. Quinn (eds), *The Strategy Process,* Prenice Hall, N.J. 1992 p.96-105

[32] We have taken the distinction between episodic and continuous change from Weick. & Quinn, Organizational Change and Development, Annual Review of Psychology, 1999. 50: pp. 361-386

[33] Jørgen Frode Bakka, *Hvordan lærer ledere at lære,* in J.F. Baka (ed) *Fra ledelseslærens værksted,* Dafolo Forlag, Frederishavn 1988 and R.W. Revans, *Action Learning,* London 1980. (*The* book on the issue).

[34] Chris Argyris & Donald A. Schön, *Organizational leaning II*, Addison – Wesley Readings, 1996

[35] J.C. Ry Nielsen, Organisationsændringer i Bygge- og boligdirektorat, København 1987 (unpublished manus)

[36] Ry Nielsen, J.C. 2002. Organisational Change, Elected Leaders, and Selected Managers. Paper Presented at "Research on Leadership", Oxford, December.

mangers, the other with administrative managers. Joint meetings were also held.

Group processes were often discussed with or without external assistance. But nothing much changes. The head of the secretariat has in this way got increasing power, and has at the same time turned out to bottleneck in the organisation. Due to his power position the top manager thus becomes involved in more and more cases without getting rid of other tasks.

This phenomenon has been openly discussed, but nothing much happens.

In December 2003 the group tries again with external assistance from the senior author of this paper.

There may be a political interest in defining changes as incremental adjustments, may be easier to get through.

The Opportunity Model

In the Bakka and Ry Nielsen version of the garbage can model the emphasis is put on the "streams" in the model. Any organisation can at a given time be seen as consisting of four streams:
- Decision opportunities
- Problems
- Solutions
- Energy

In the original model it is rather complicated to find out, whether the result of the processes becomes a "resolution", "flight" or "oversight"[37]. In the simplified version this complexity is toned down.

Bakka and Ry Nielsen instead emphasise the possibilities of the model as a change model. We know that problems are abundant and looking for solutions. We also know that solutions exist that are looking for problems. There is latent energy in the shape of time and resources hidden in the organisation. Finally there are a lot of change opportunities. Some come naturally by way of existing procedures for business plans, budgets, and the yearly development dialogues with the boss and the employees. Others must be created, however. Put simply it is the manager's or change agent's job to create or to utilise change opportunities in such a way that it becomes legitimate to participate –using energy - with problems and solutions.

The legitimation can give rise to creativity, mobilisation of enthusiasm, it may couple otherwise loosely coupled individuals, organisational units, or ideas or reinforce the very same loosely coupling [38]. Viewed this way the Opportunity Model falls under Borum's heading "The Explorative

---

[37] Enderud, op.cit.p. 117-120
[38] J.D. Orton & Kark E. Weick (1990), *Loosely Coupled System, A Reconceptualization*, Academy of Management Review, Vol15. No 2:203-223. Here quoted from Finn Borum, *Stragier.,* op.cit. p 94-96

Change Strategy"[39]. But it is also a model that can create episodic radical changes, if the four streams are combined in a specific way and supported from the environment.

Finally it must be noticed that pitfalls exist. One is to overload a given opportunity with too many problems and solutions. A second is to raise too many expectations from the participants about results, when there are imposed severe limitations from above in the hierarchy or from the environment.

Project Management in an Imperfect World[40]

Christensen and Kreiner (1991) belong to the researchers who challenge the conventional wisdom of rational project management. They argue that clarity and stability are more absent than present in organisations (ibid 105 ff). We live in an imperfect world that is more like a loosely coupled system (Orton &Weick 1990) or an organised anarchy (March) or more specifically in a world with an insecure and unpredictable environment .
Knowing that one should acknowledge that in projects e.g.
- Terms of reference are preliminary..
- Planned courses can change
- Mile stones can change
- Role distribution can change over time due to changes in environment.
The environment in many ways thus sets the agenda.
Accordingly solutions are being evaluated in relation to their use for the organisation, not according to the original goals.
Project management is not made easier this way, but more messy and challenging. We cannot rely on our rational routines.
To help project managers Christensen and Kreiner (ibid 97-105) present 10 pieces of advice that they believe that would help project managers:

---

[39] Finn Borum Ibid chapter 7
[40] Søren Christensen & Kristian Kreiner, *Projekltedelse i løst koblede systemer.* Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag København 1991

Illustration

10. Ten heretic advice on project management in an imperfect world[41]

1. Establish your project in a vision that at the same time is specific and can hold many possible solutions
2. Do not assault the perspectives on reality held by the participants by authorizing a common reality for the project
3. Adjust the project goal to the situation – all the time
4. Use the project plans strategically – to take bearing of the project achievements
5. Make unreasonable demands, insist and be fair in fixing the penalty
6. Be present but not available
7. Do not fear chaos. Only then is management and coordination meaningful.
8. Share the success of the project with the participants. You are likely to be dependant on each other later.
9. Define the boarders of the project according to the situation.
10. You always have the responsibility for ….. – rarely the power to…..

We will not elaborate on the advice here, but follow Christensen and Kreiner (ibid:106) when they say that their analysis and advice "should be taken seriously, but not literally".

We would also like to follow Bøje Larsen, when he states that in organised anarchies and loosely coupled organisations nothing is gained by using flat rational models. It is better to utilise the possibilities that exist than to hide them in a rational plan[42]

We believe, however that most project managers would find it difficult to follow the advice. The authors are deliberately over dramatizing in their wording[43], but the analysis and the advice would be of interest to discus, when the conditions of a given project are changing. But as this is far from the rational agenda the discussion might have to start backstage.

The Technology of Foolishness[44]

One of the problems with rational project management is, that goals often change, get obsolete or lost. The project manager will then most often look for new goals from outside. But she might also get inspiration from a different kind of reasoning.

She would not find much help in most of the economic literature or elsewhere. This was March's contention when he introduced technology of foolishness as such a tool.

Out the many ideas in the article we have been most fascinated by the child-adult analogy. Jess Hansen and Ry Nielsen have elaborated on the analogy and came to the results shown in figure 8[45]:

---

[41] We got the translation from Søren Christensen

[42] Bøje Larsen, (2002), *Mening i galskaben.* Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag:København p. 126

[43]Somehow it is a pity when people feel obliged characterise themselves as provocative or heretic. That judgement should be left to the readers

[44] The original presentation of the ideas was given at CBS in 1971and attended by the senior author of this paper. It was published in a Danish journal; James March (1971), *The Technology of Foolishness,* Civiløkonomen, København. Also in J. March (1995) *Fornuft og forandring,* Samfundslitteratur: København.

Child Model	Adult Model
Action	Goals
Play	Analysis
Questions	Answers
Joy	Seriousness
Amateur	Professional

The authors have tried to get Danish project managers and line managers to adopt the child model, but in vain. It is too far away from the rational model. The anarchic models come into play by sheer necessity. To apply the child model requires an explicit decision. We got managers in one trade union to compare different approaches to organisational change and among these the child model in a training session, but the model was perceived as being too far out.

Participation and Commitment

As noted in the introduction we have supplemented Enderud with the participation aspect, as we believe that people get more committed, when they participate in the change projects, mind you if they are taken seriously.

The Scandinavian tradition on participation is strong. Co-operation between the parties on the labour market and in the individual organisation is much prevalent than antagonistic attitudes[46] Above in Illustration we have already referred to Bjørn Gustavsen, who is an excellent representative of the Scandinavian tradition. We will continue that line.

Putting Habermas into practice Gustavsen (1991) elaborates the idea of a democratic (or equal) dialogue[47]

Gustavsen enumerates 13 items that constitute the basic conditions for a democratic dialogue. We will, however follow Ry Nielsen (1993) in mentioning only 8 of the 13 items.[48]

1. All affected persons should participate
2. All must be active and look after that others also become active
3. All are equal - the dialogue must restrict differences not underline them
4. Working experience forms a good point of departure for the discussions
5. All arguments are legitimate – implying that the dialogue also represents a learning process
6. All must accept that the participants may have better arguments
7. The dialogue must tolerate an increasing degree of disagreement
8. The dialogue must all the time produce agreements about practical initiatives

[45] Anne Marie Jess Hansen & J.C. Ry Nielsen, *Strategi – et essay om generaler, brandstationer, stifindere og børn*, in Ledelse i dag, no. 20/vinter 1995 p. 22-32.
[46] See e.g. Ry Nielsen, J.C., Povl Anker Andersen & Morten Ry (2002), From Activism to Social Patnership and Professionalism – An Analysis of a Danish Trade Union 1981-2002, Paper for The Employment Research Unit Annual Conference 12. -13. September 2002, Cardiff
[47] Bjørn Gustavsen (1991), *Strategier for utvikling i arbeidslivet*, Oslo: Tanum
[48] J.C. Ry Nielsen (1993) *Om samarbejde- det gode og det mindre gode.* Published in J. C. Ry Nielsen (1993), *Anderledes tanker om livet I organisationer* København: Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne

Illustration

11. A steering committee elected on the basis of trust
The scene is set in the social service department of a municipality in the neighbourhood of Copenhagen. The department had embarked on a change project that involved everybody in the department i.e. about 100 persons.[49] The project was problem oriented and the participants were said to in control, although the researcher consultants from Copenhagen Business School designed the process.

The first phase of the process consisted of everybody contributing with everyday problems that they would like to see treated/solved.

The second phase was setting up a lot of working groups. Participation in the groups was widespread and cross departmental. It was furthermore decided that the whole department should be in charge of decisions.

But how to keep track on the working groups?

The consultants proposed and everybody agreed on a very special steering committee. The committee should consist of persons that were elected on the basis of trust. The group was elected/appointed with no problems. It was not difficult to find three persons that everybody trusted. The group worked hard and had great success.

The implementation of the work groups' result was the next phase. The consultants proposed that the usual hierarchy should take over now. The department decided, however that they would continue with the experiment. And so they did. Three new persons were found. Again the process was quite unproblematic.

12. Emergency Solution
Now the scene is set in an IT department (40 persons) in a large organisation. With the help of en external consultant the department is assembled at a seminar to talk about how to improve working life in the department.[50] During the discussions distrust to the management group was given tit for tat. Disagreement in the management group came to surface, too. But most remarkable was the harsh criticism of the top person of the department.

A speedy follow-up action was necessary. In this situation the consultant referred to his experience described above. Nobody really believed in a group of employees elected on the basis of trust, but as an emergency solution it was accepted by everyone the day after the seminar!

The group functioned rather well, but ran into problems with the management group. The consultant had to play the role of the mediator between the two groupings. The distrust did not disappear, but especially the person at the top tried hard to improve her image.

The department ended up with creating a new management group and a new strategy group. In the latter group one employee got a seat!

---

[49] Christensen, Søren & J.C. Ry Nielsen (1981) "Organisationsændringer i Social- og Sundhedsforvaltningen" I-III. København: DIOS

[50] J..C. Ry Nielsen (1993) "En ledergruppe i aktion?" i *Ledelse og Økonomi* Also in Ry Nielsen (1993) Anderledes .. op.cit.

Combination

We agree with Buchanan & Boddy that in organisation change no single model will work. It must be a combination. But which combination will of course depend on the specific project in the actual organisation.

In order to find out which combination to use it is important for project management to be conscious of the fact that shifts in models can take place and pay attention to signals that may imply changes in perspectives/models. To that end the fire station metaphor may be useful[51].

Illustration
13. The fire station metaphor
A modern fire station has a lot of features that other organisations could benefit from.

First of all it is always *ready* to act. It is well prepared. The materiel is present and the people are on guard, Everybody has a *here-and-now mentality*. When the alarm sounds, the necessary number of people and fire engines is put into action. On the spot there is no doubt about whom is in charge. There is a *decentralised decision structure*. Before leaving the fire station and on the way the chief fire officer can read about the burning construction in the *updated data basis*. There is navigation equipment in the fire engine to secure the fastest way

It is also well known where to find the necessary hydrants and connect the fire hoses to them and set the pumps to work.

The technically based *collaboration* with the police and hospitals will secure that the police will be on the fire spot as soon as the fire brigade, and that ambulances and doctors will be on their way if necessary.

One of the success criteria is to arrive at the spot, before the fire gets too violent. Therefore *early warning systems* such as smoke detectors are important. An easy to remember emergency number is also significant.

Emergency exits and *local fire extinguishers* are therefore demanded in many houses.
Legislation also put demands on constructions from a fire protection viewpoint.
Finally one could say that of course the firemen are not at work all the time, so that there is *slack* in the system.

When organisations are faced with an unpredictable and uncontrollable environment it might be useful to discuss the organisation's preparedness for surprises, or for orders coming down the hierarchy. We do also know, that change projects do not exhibit linearity[52].

Consequently much more effort could be put into early warning systems. No doubt every organisation will have to find its own answers. It is more important, however that it is able to ask the correct questions.

---

[51] Ry Nielsen & Ry 2002a

Following this model we would like to introduce the idea of buffering from Thomsen.[53] Buffering in the sense that smaller parts of the project are parcelled out in order to protect these smaller parts so that they can focus on the rational core. Political processes, anarchic models will thus be the responsibility of the steering committee to handle. We must hope that the ideas we wrote about in participation will be present in the steering committee so that the steering committee can function both as an umbrella and as the central place for conflict handling.

The different models of project management clearly demand different qualifications of the project manager.
The rational model implies that the project manager must demonstrate professional expertise in relation to the content as well as project planning and control.
The political model implies that the project manager must have political flair, the right connections and persuasion skill. As political processes may take place both on stage and back stage, the project manager must master both scenes.
The anarchic models imply that the project manager must be able to handle uncertainty, see and make use of opportunities when they arise and be pragmatic in the sense that he prefers here-and-know small results to uncertain future prospects.
The participation approach implies that the project manager must be able to function as a process consultant[54]. He must be able to conduct back stage activities in an ethical and not cynical manner.

Seldom the project manager will posses all of these qualifications. Following our reasoning above, we would argue that these qualifications should be represented in the overall project management, e.g. in the steering committee.

Another way of solving the qualification challenge would be to follow Galbraiths recommendation[55] and shift project manager in the course of the project.

Perspectives

We have hopefully demonstrated the turbulent nature of project management in organisation change projects. In the above essay telling we have abandoned two features of project management, i.e. chance and luck. We are convinced that many projects are characterised by surprises and luck[56], if successful. But still – luck seems to follow the hard working and the powerful. Action combined with reflection seems to give results, too.

To conclude, as a working model we have conceived the following:

---

[52] Lars Erik Lyngdal & J.C. Ry Nielsen, *Overraskelser og kritiske hændelser i organisationsforandringsforløb,* manus Krisianssand 1996 and Finn Borum, *Om planlagt forandrings umulighed* in Steen Hildebrandt & Erik Johnsen (eds.), Ledelse II - 10 danske professorers bud på aktuel ledelse, Børsen Bøger, København 1995 p. 39-57
[53] James Thomsen, *Organizations in Action*, 1967
[54] Edgar Schein, *Process Consultation, vol. II*, 1988, New Jersey: Addisson Wesley
[55] Jay Galbraith, *Designing Complex Organizations,* 1973, New Jersey: Addisson Wesley
[56] Luck occurs when preparation meets opportunity (Seneca, Roman philosopher and moralist 4 BC –65 AD)
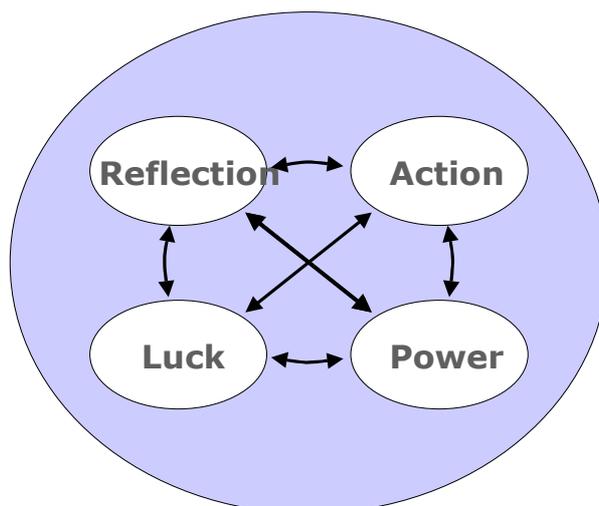
To this model we will add some of the underlying perspectives that may play a significant role in determining the outcome of a given change process. The degree of humour, enthusiasm and optimism are some of the relevant perspectives.

References

Andersen, Povl Anker, J.C. Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry (2000)*, Strategisk forandringsprocesser i Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund,* in Torben Agersnap & Steen Scheuer (eds), *Strategi og anarki*, Nyt fra Samfunds-videnskaberne, København

Andersen, Povl Anker, J.C. Ry Nielsen & Morten Ry (2000), *Ændringsprocesser i Socialpædagogernes Landsforbund - Strategi, overraskelser og ledelse*, MPA Working Paper no. 10, København

Argyris, Chris & Schön, Donald A. (1996), Organizational leaning II, Addison – Wesley Readings

Bakka, J.F. & J.C. Ry Nielsen (1982) "Organisationsændringer i Social- og Sundhedsforvaltningen. Konsulenternes analyse." København: DIOS

Berg, P.O. & Poulfeldt, F. (eds) (1998), Ledelseslæren i Norden, Dafolo Forlag, Frederikshavn

Borum, Finn, *Om planlagt forandrings umulighed* in Steen Hildebrandt & Erik Johnsen (eds.) (1995), Ledelse II - 10 danske professorers bud på aktuel ledelse, Børsen Bøger, København p. 39-57

Borum, Finn (1995), *Strategier for organisationsændring,* Handelshøjskolens Forlag, København

Bøje Larsen, (2002), Mening i galskaben. Jurist- og Økonomforbundets Forlag:København

Carlzon, Jan (1985), *Riv pyamiderne ned,* Gyldendal, København

Christensen, Søren & Kreiner, Kristian (1991), Projekltedelse i løst koblede systemer. København

Christensen, Søren & J.C. Ry Nielsen (1981) "Organisationsændringer i Social- og Sundhedsforvaltningen" I-III. København: DIOS

Cohen, Michael, March, James & Olsen, Johan P (1972), A garbage can model of organizational choice Administrative Science Quartely, March

Enderud, Harald (1976), Beslutninger i organisationer, København, Fremad

Gustavsen, Bjørn (1992), *Dialogue and Development*, van Gorcum Assen/Maastricht

Gustavsen, Bjørn (1991), Strategier for utvikling i arbeidslivet, Oslo: Tanum

Jess Hansen, Anne Marie & Ry Nielsen, J.C. (1995), Strategi – et essay om generaler, brandstationer, stifindere og børn, in Ledelse i dag, no. 20/vinter

Lindblom, Charles (1959), The Science of Muddling Through, Public Administrative Review vii XIX, Spring

Lyngdal, Lars Erik & J.C. Ry Nielsen (1996), *Overraskelser og kritiske hændelser i organisationsforandringsforløb,* manus Krisianssand

March, James (1971), The Technology of Foolishness, Civiløkonomen, København

March, James (1995), *Fornuft og forandring,* Samfundslitteratur, København

March, James & Simon, Herbert (1958), Organizations, N.Y. John Wiley

Mikkelsen & Riis (2003), Projekledelse, 7. ed København

Mintzberg, Henry & Quinn, James B. (eds) (1992), The Strategy Process, Prenice Hall, N.J.

Orton, J.D. & Karl E. Weick (1990), *Loosely Coupled System, A Reconceptualization*, Academy of Management Review, Vol 15. No 2:203-223

Project Management Institute, Standards Committee (1996), A guide to the Project Management Body of Knowledge, Upper Darby,

Ry Nielsen, J. C. (1987), *Bygge- og Boligdirektoratet*, København (not published)

Ry Nielsen, J.C. (1993) "Om samarbejde- det gode og det mindre gode", bl.a. i Anderledes tanker… cit.ovenfor

Ry Nielsen, J.C. (1981) "Problemer og muligheder ved en længerevarende forsker/konsulentrelation til samme organisation" . Paper præsenteret ved en konference i Stockholm. Også i J.C. Ry Nielsen (red) Artikelsamling til konsulentrollen. København: Undervisningsmaterialer

Ry Nielsen, J.C. (1993) "En ledergruppe i aktion?" i Ledelse og Erhvervsøkonomi.

Ry Nielsen, J.C. (1993), Anderledes tanker om livet i organisationer, København: Samfundslitteratur

Ry Nielsen, J.C. (2002). Organisational Change, Elected Leaders, and Selected Managers. Paper Presented at "Research on Leadership", Oxford, December

Ry Nielsen, J.C. & Ry, Morten (2002), Anderledes tanker om Leavitt – en klassiker i ny belysning, København: Nyt fra Samfundsvidenskaberne

Ry Nielsen, J.C. & Ry, Morten (2002a), The Danish Public Sector- an Endless Journey of Organisational Change, Papers in Organisation No 45, Copenhagen Business School

Ry Nielsen, J.C., Andersen, Povl Anker & Ry, Morten (2002), From Activism to Social Patnership and Professionalism – An Analysis of a Danish Trade Union 1981-2002, Paper for The Employment Research Unit Annual Conference 12. -13. September 2002, Cardiff

Sahlin-Andersson & Söderholm (eds) (2002), Beyond Project Management – New perspectives on the temporary – permanent dilemma, Malmö

Schein, Edgar H. (1988), *Process Consultation II*, Addison- Wesley

Selznik Philip (1949) TVA and the Grass Roots, Berkeley and Los Angeles:University of California Press

Thomsen, James D, 81967) *Organizations in Action*, N:Y: MacGraw-Hill

Weick, Karl E. & Robert E. Quinn (1999), *Organizational Change and Development*, Annual Review of Psychology, 50: pp. 361-386