

PART ONE

Understanding conversational approaches to change

In this first section we introduce the conversation-based approach to change. However, before we explain what it is, we explain what it isn't by reviewing the current dominant approach to organizational change. Chapter 1 explores the machine metaphor of organizations that is at the root of so much of our current change-directed behaviour. We consider how this metaphor for understanding organizations became so pre-eminent and how its influence can be detected in unspoken organizational beliefs about people at work, the role of management and how to induce change.

In Chapter 2 we introduce an alternative view of organizations. We consider organizations as living human systems and look at how this different perspective encourages different beliefs about people at work, the role of management and how to effect organizational change. Specifically, we consider the importance of patterns of relationship and communication within organizations for both organizational stability and change.

In Chapter 3 we consider how these conversational approaches to understanding organizations and organizational change have developed from different sources of thought. We notice how, from different origins, they are beginning to converge on some common ground. Particularly, we note what they have to suggest about the nature and role of conversation in organizational life, and why this might be a particularly attractive way of understanding organizations at the beginning of the 21st century.

Finally, in Chapter 4, we examine one conversation-based approach to change in more detail: Appreciative Inquiry. This book is intended to be practical as well as theoretical and we have chosen Appreciative Inquiry as our practical example of a conversational process both because we know it well, and also because there is currently a groundswell of interest in this approach. In this chapter we explain how to set up and run a standard Appreciative Inquiry Summit as an example of conversation-based practice in action.

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Organizations 01 as machines, workers as cogs and management as a control process

Introduction

An important feature of the conversation-based approach to organizational change featured throughout this book is that it is based on an understanding of organizations as living human systems. This statement regarding the nature of organizations may seem as if it is stating the obvious. Yet it stands in stark contrast to the widespread if unacknowledged view of them as really just large machines with some human components. This mechanistic view of organizations is a legacy of the Industrial Revolution, and we have chosen to devote this first chapter to illuminating this view in order to throw the difference between these two perspectives into sharper relief.

We begin the chapter by observing the long history of human organization. We notice how the various forms of self-organization developed over time seemed inadequate to the task of meeting the organizational demands of the Industrial Revolution. We explore how the emergence of the large corporations, themselves a response to these challenges, acted as a trigger to questions about the nature of large organizations and to a desire for guidance. From here we single out Frederick Taylor as the architect of the idea of the organization as a machine, an idea that spread through the development and dissemination of his *Principles of Scientific Management* (1912). Finally, we examine the ongoing impact of Taylor's blueprint for the efficient organization on many aspects of organizational life. By illuminating the

organization-as-machine view in some depth we hope to make it easier to see that the living-human-system view, presented in Chapter 2 and throughout the rest of the book, offers a genuinely alternative way to understand, and work within, organizations.

Organization as a group social skill

Ever since the bigger, better, higher-value coconuts were observed to be on the islands across the channel, interested individuals have found ways to organize themselves into groups to take the risks, and reap the rewards, of being the ones to venture forth. Often these individuals weren't related, which meant they weren't operating within the clear framework of obligation provided by family ties. This lack of family ties created the need for more formal agreements regarding the obligations between them. Such agreements had to meet the challenge of ensuring that the relationship between the degree of exposure to risk experienced by each individual, and their share of the rewards, was fair and could be upheld. Many forms of agreement were created to meet these challenges so that people could make the most of the opportunities available for wealth generation. These agreements took such forms as: partnerships, guilds, joint venture companies, joint stock companies, state sponsored companies and companies by Royal Charter.

While all of these organizational structures had their virtues, they also had limitations. Many of these arrangements were time limited, or were for a specific purpose only, and so had to be constructed anew for each new venture. Longer-term agreements ran into difficulties if a founder died or wanted to leave the arrangement, as inheritance issues were difficult to resolve. No agreement was able to solve the problem of unlimited liability for those involved. These various difficulties conspired to ensure that any particular organization rarely lasted any length of time or outlived the founders' active involvement. Once the Industrial Revolution was under way, requiring huge investment to build canals and railways, these limitations became more pressing (Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2003).

Fortunately for would-be investors and entrepreneurs, The Companies Act of 1862 provided an answer to the challenges outlined above by making possible the development of the limited liability joint stock company. It is difficult now, since it is such an accepted part of our economic and commercial landscape, to appreciate the revolutionary nature of this piece of legislation. The Act encapsulated three ideas which, put together and enshrined in legal form, changed the organizational environment in an unprecedented way.

These ideas were: that a company could be an artificial person; that it could issue tradable shares to any number of individuals; and that the individual investors could all be offered limited liability. The Act facilitated the creation of an entity that had a life of its own, a construction that endured as individuals joined and left. This acted to free the organization from its founders and from reliance on the financial resources of a few socially cohesive people. It also freed organizations from an obligation to have a specific limited purpose such as building a canal, or opening up trading opportunities in India. Now a company could be formed for the general purpose of 'doing business', meaning that it could live for ever. The modern corporation now dominates the economic and consumer experience, influencing both how we work and how we consume. The preponderance of big corporations (5.5 million in the United States in 2001 – Micklethwait and Wooldridge, 2003), combined with the prevalence of organizations in the spheres of education, religion and state, ensures that we live our lives within the inescapable context of organizations. No wonder we are interested in how they work and how to improve them.

Taylorism and Scientific Management

One of the first people to engage with the challenge of the modern corporation was the American Frederick Taylor. Born into a Quaker family in 1865, Taylor displayed some interesting personal characteristics from an early age. For example, it is recorded that he was fairly compulsive as a young adolescent, always counting and measuring things with the object of improving how things could be done. He also invented a harness for himself to wear in bed when he was about 12, to stop him turning on his back and so prevent the nightmares from which he suffered. He was very bright and his family had hopes that he would become a lawyer, but he chose instead to study engineering and started in employment as a low-ranking machinist and pattern maker at the Midvale Steel Company. He rose up the organization quickly, becoming chief engineer within six years. During this time he introduced piece-rate working to the organization, and displayed a general interest in studying how jobs were done and how they could be done more efficiently (Burnes, 2000; Papesh, 2006).

These interests in efficiency and innovation are evident throughout Taylor's career. In 1897 he became a consulting engineer, working to help organizations become more productive and profitable. He noted some of the problems in organizations, such as work-shirking or foot-dragging, and

what he called ‘soldiering’, that is, doing the least necessary. He was keen to help organizations reduce this unproductive approach to work. However, his early proposals of how to solve these problems involved a certain amount of what Rose calls ‘managerial thuggery’ (Rose, 1988), such as victimization, sacking and blacklisting of workers he found inadequate. He also introduced very effective time- and motion-based improvements in ways of working and so productivity. His ruthless focus on efficiency gains and cost-cutting (including cutting labour costs) made him many enemies, to the extent that he was removed from his most lucrative and successful assignment at Bethlehem Iron Works in 1901. Following this he devoted his time to developing his comprehensive theory of Scientific Management (Figure 1.1) (Papesh, 2006).

Figure 1.1 A summary of the principles of Scientific Management

A Summary of the Principles of Scientific Management

- Shift all responsibility for the organization of the work from the worker to the manager. Managers should do all the thinking relating to the planning and design of work, leaving workers with the task of implementation.
- Use scientific methods to determine the most efficient way of doing work. Design the worker’s task accordingly, specifying the precise way in which the work is to be done.
- Select the best person to perform the job thus designed.
- Train the worker to do the work efficiently.
- Monitor worker performance to ensure that appropriate work procedures are followed and that appropriate results are achieved.

Morgan (1997)

A summary of the assumptions underpinning the Principles

We might note the assumptions inherent in his work, as spelt out in his testimony to the House of Representatives Committee in 1912, or identified by Collins, that:

- there is one *scientifically* verifiable best way to organize work;
- staff can be *scientifically* selected;
- workers and managers share a *mutuality of interest* because of the unitary nature of the organization;
- organizations are *rational entities*;
- people are *rational, economic actors*;
- there are scientific laws of administration from which human values and *emotions can be excluded*;
- these laws are *universal*, applicable to all and any organizations;
- organizations should be designed *scientifically*.

Collins (1998), Taylor (1912)

Frederick Taylor is extremely important to our understanding of organizations and organizational theory. In 1912 he published *The Principles of Scientific Management*, and in the same year he was called to attend a Governmental Special Committee established to investigate the Taylor and Other Systems of Shop Management. Off the back of this exposure he toured and lectured extensively, effectively becoming the first management guru or consultant. His advice and guidance were well received by the managers and owners of these new industrial organizations who were meeting the challenges of management with recourse to only their own personal experience and rules of thumb. The organizations of which they were nominally in charge were proving to be a battleground for the relative power of labour and capital. This power battle was frequently expressed through disputes over the attempted reduction of the status of the craft workers by the dismantling of their expertise, or over the imposition of disciplined ways of working. Taylor's work offered a rationalization of managers' right to manage, guidance on how to organize the business and advice on how to manage workers. His comprehensive and 'science'-based theory legitimized both the reduction of the power of skilled workers and the increase in power of the managerial class. Effectively it gave managers a story of 'righteousness' that supported their right to run the business in the most productive and profitable way regardless of the views of the employees. It did this by making it possible for managers to refer to a higher-order authority or power than their own personal whim, in this case the power of science as expressed through the authority of logic and reason.

Looking at Taylor's work, we can see an underlying story of the nature of this new organization, the corporation. Existing as an entity in its own right, and drawing down authority from the gods of science and technology, the corporation was looking less and less like a human construction. For Taylor, an engineer by trade, it began instead to look more and more like a machine. Imbued as he was with an awareness of the value of efficiency in all things, he began to conceptualize the organization as a machine in need of efficiency improvements. For Taylor the way forward to a more peaceful and productive organizational environment was through engineering the organization. His whole blueprint for how an organization should be successfully managed is based on the understanding of the organization as a vast machine. Calling on a contemporary understanding of organizational metaphor (Morgan, 1997), we can say that his underlying metaphor is of the organization-as-machine. This metaphor has proved to be extremely durable and extremely powerful in influencing our understanding of, and behaviour within, organizations. The majority of managers and workers, whether they realize it or not, carry

this idea of an organization into their every organizational interaction. Many of Taylor's specific principles, as well as his underlying assumptions, appear to have penetrated the very ether of organizational belief, being present as unspoken and widely accepted truisms (Figure 1.2).

Figure 1.2 Taylor's legacy evident today

Taylor's legacy still evident today

- Efficiency being regarded as an unquestioned organizational virtue, often at the expense of other organizational virtues, such as effectiveness.
- The science of job design with its emphasis on simplification and specialization is still present, for instance in service industry assembly lines.
- The importance of management and organizational studies.
- The process of business planning and strategy, and the industry around it.
- The command and control organizational structure.
- Job measurement, job evaluation and job equivalence.
- The emphasis on one best way of organizing.
- The unitary view of organizations, and the concomitant concept of 'resistance to change'.
- The understanding of organizations as rational machines.
- Management as control.
- Target setting and standardization.
- The emphasis on productivity.

Taylor's legacy regarding our understanding of organizations in change

- The understanding of leaders as the head and the organization as the body, with all that that assumption entails.
- The premise of predictable and controllable change.
- An assumption of cascading intention.

It is important that we examine the beliefs that follow from this idea of the organization-as-machine as they act as highly influential, yet usually unarticulated, rationales for change-orientated behaviours. Below we select a few of these beliefs to examine in more depth, looking at their relationship to the mechanistic understanding of organizations and their influence on organizational behaviour.

Belief in the power of problem solving to change organizations

Human beings are great problem solvers. Not only do we have a natural ability to improve our environment, that is, to solve all manner of problems that are pertinent to us, but we also hone this natural ability during our

years at school into highly developed logic-based reasoning skills. Having these skills, we then tend to see all problems as being solvable by their application. The organization-as-machine metaphor only encourages this tendency, leading us to see all problems as problems of logic. These are familiar from our school days; for example, 'If train A leaves Edinburgh at 6.20, and train B leaves London at 6.50 and both are travelling at 100 mph, when and where will they pass?' Reading this, you will immediately have noticed that we don't have all the information necessary to solve the problem, yet you will also likely be of the view that with appropriate information we could. It is this conviction, that with the right information we could solve the problem, which is at the heart of logic-based problem solving. So when we say that we believe a problem to be a problem of logic, we are saying that we believe that if we can find, create or generate sufficient data and analyse it against a set of criteria, then the right (and indeed the best) answer to our problem will emerge. We can have faith on this being the best answer to our problem as it will be based on rational thinking, free from distortion by such contaminating factors as feelings, beliefs, values or prejudice.

This basic data analysis process works for many problems, and we use it all the time. If I want to know what time to catch a train I gather data about train times and journey lengths, weigh them against my criteria of quality of journey and 'contingency time' and decide on the particular train for me: problem solved. It also works for some categories of organizational change, and organizational theory abounds with more or less sophisticated models of this process. Pascal *et al* (2000) suggest that this form of problem solving is appropriate when the desired end state is known in advance, and the skills and motivation exist to achieve it. For instance, if the desired change is an increase in the ratio of the production of widget A to widget B, and the workers are multi-skilled and quite used to adjusting the production ratio, then treating this as a problem of logic might well result in the development of a successful change plan. This will then be communicated and implemented through the creation and implementation of a more or less formal project plan. In the case of larger-scale organizational change the application of logical problem-solving methods tends in practice to result in a series of project plans. Project plans work well as a route to change when, as stated above, the desired end state is known, the skills to achieve it already exist and the workers are motivated to achieve it; however, these conditions are frequently not present when organizations need to change. In this case, a different approach is required.

Problems arise when organizations make a category error and fail to recognize that they are now dealing with a qualitatively different challenge.

This failure of distinction arises as the logic-based problem-solving model is so pervasive that there is a tendency to perceive all issues of organizational change as issues of logical problem solving; and to treat them as such. Even change plan failure is taken not as evidence that the approach is at fault, but rather as evidence that the selected process has not been applied rigorously enough. In this instance it is assumed that to rectify the problem more of the same is needed. In this way organizations can get caught in a vicious circle of ever more planning, relentlessly increasing levels of plan-adherence monitoring, and escalating demands on those involved to supply ever more data. Organizations show this persistence in applying logical problem-solving methods despite a lack of any evidence of success because it's their default mode and because they have little awareness of alternatives. Yet however expertly or determinedly a change process is applied, if there has been a category error, then the process can't deliver the desired change. Working within the metaphor of organization-as-machine makes it easy to see every issue as a problem, and every problem as a problem of logic. It makes it hard to see people as fully rounded human beings living in a world where the force of logic is only a small and partial determinant of their actions. It makes it hard to see change as being embedded in patterns of human communication and relationship.

Belief in the power of naming problems to produce change

In the same way that organizations often act as if they believe that creating an action plan is the key to implementing change, so they can often act as if naming a problem is the key to initiating change. Believing this, organizations can devote considerable resources to determining the answer to the question 'What is the problem?' Those charged with initiating change will draw in outsiders to help them answer this question and related ones such as 'What is the real problem?', 'What is the main problem?' or 'What is the underlying problem?' Meetings are convened to devote time to these questions. The reward for these endeavours is worth the effort as once an issue is named as a problem, a process exists for dealing with it: the problem-solving process. When they are thinking like this, organizations can make everything into a problem. For instance, something might start off as an opportunity, or a challenge or an unexpected event, but it becomes, through the unconscious application of the problem-solving model, a problem as in 'The problem is

how we are going to make the most of this opportunity’ or ‘The problem is how we are going to meet the challenge’. Sometimes it’s almost as if we can’t see issues in organizations until we can see them as a problem, that we can’t think about things until we can think about them as a problem. Clearly, though, if you get the problem wrong then the solution will be wrong, hence the emphasis on getting the problem right.

Thinking of organizations as machines that sometimes develop problems that need fixing makes it hard for organizations to embrace change as a positive activity to be engaged in when nothing is wrong. The majority of us display this attitude to the machines in our lives; take, for instance, our attitude to our cars. For most of us, if our car is working well, then, apart from maintaining it, we leave it alone. When it draws our attention to itself, by going wrong, then we work to fix it. Many managers and leaders see their organizations the same way. Change is seen as an interruption to the normal smooth running of the organization, by its very nature disruptive. It is only to be encouraged if there is a problem to fix. This means that when someone wants to introduce some innovative change, they have first to create an awareness of a problem. Once the organization’s attention has been drawn to the problem, then they might be interested in the proposed solution. Cooperrider notes that this way of thinking eventually results in organizations being seen as problems, and organization being seen as inherently problematic. ‘It’s not so much that organizations have problems, they are problems’ (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2001: 25). The organization becomes focused on finding and fixing problems. So if you want to draw the organization’s attention to something, you have to identify it as a problem. In many organizations one of the most powerful attention-grabbing phrases is ‘We’ve got a problem here’, which often leads straight into the naming game, as in ‘What type of a problem?’

Belief in the power of instruction to achieve change

Organizations are beset by the belief that telling people what to do or what is needed is a sure-fire way to achieve the desired change – despite daily evidence that telling people what to do, or what you want, doesn’t work. Evidence of the hopeless optimism of this belief is present in every aspect of our lives. If telling people what to do made them adapt or change their behaviour we would all have perfectly behaved children, and gum-free

pavements, yet we don't. People rarely do what they are told unless some specific conditions exist, namely: that they have specifically asked for guidance on what to do (and even then they don't always follow the advice given); that they are in dire straits and need someone to do their thinking for them (if you offer the drowning man the proverbial straw and tell him to clutch it he probably will); or that they can be coerced by the application of unpleasant consequences for non-compliance. Fortunately for those in organizations who wish to produce change by instruction, this last condition is often present. Many workplaces are very coercive environments and there are unpleasant penalties for not doing what you are told. You are expected to comply with organizational requests regardless of your own feelings about the matter, and should you feel disinclined to do so then various coercive measures, such as informal 'dressing-downs' or formal disciplinary procedures, can be brought into play. In such an environment, telling people what to do may well produce compliance. However, when people do things because they have to, rather than because they want to, over time unintended consequences become apparent. Coercive environments can contribute to poor morale, work avoidance and work absence (Sidman, 1989).

The belief that emotions are problematic

The organization-as-machine metaphor has no place for emotions. Emotions and emotional displays are seen as problematic and are as much as possible to be factored out of organizational functioning. Effective workers in organizations are desired to act as if they have no other role in life, as if they have no life outside work, and as if they don't experience emotional reactions to life. When people do display strong emotions at work, this is often seen as problematic, and the behaviour acquires a problem label. In the context of organizational change, a strong negative emotional reaction to the suggested change is usually labelled 'resistance' or 'lack of understanding' or 'a communication problem', all of which are seen as problems, more or less amenable to fixing. Rarely is such a reaction labelled as a legitimate reaction to unpleasant news, or as useful information about an aspect of the change that may have been overlooked. In the same way that patients get in the way of a smoothly run hospital, and schools are disrupted by noisy and inattentive pupils, so people, when they start behaving like people, can be a thorn in the side of a smooth-running organizational machine.

Belief in the power of criticism and fear to motivate change

For all that organizations may operate within the belief that telling people what they need to change will do the trick, they do not rely on the power of instruction alone. A lot of organizational energy is devoted to the vexed question of motivation, and its first cousin, performance management. When managers are considering how to help staff improve their performance, criticism, usually called feedback, is often the first port of call. Giving feedback is motivated by, among other things, a belief that illuminating the logical argument for change will be sufficient to induce change. The logic assumption runs along the lines of: 'If I tell you what the problem is with what you are doing (how it's wrong), and what you need to do about it (to put it right), then you will understand the logic of the situation and the need for change and so will change.' Emotions, therefore, needn't come into it. However, it is not uncommon to experience strong negative reactions when 'given feedback'. Specifically, people often feel fearful, upset, criticized and attacked. It is these very emotions that act as the motivation for change as people work to avoid a repeat of the unpleasant experience or to regain the regard of their manager. Without this emotional component the 'feedback' would be a lot less effective in achieving behavioural change. However, organizations find this emotional fallout problematic (after all, emotions have no place in a machine), and so they spend a fair amount of time attempting to work out how this 'feedback' can be given 'constructively', that is, in a manner that doesn't cause an adverse emotional reaction. This desire to produce behaviour change without producing an emotional reaction ties the organization into an unrealized paradox as they rely on the emotional impact to achieve the motivation for change, while simultaneously working to ensure that no emotional impact is felt.

The emotional fallout for the individual and ultimately the organization of an over-reliance on this form of motivation can be severe and long term. A particular danger of too much 'constructive feedback', that is, criticism, is the withdrawal of a willingness to innovate, volunteer or take risks. And, in tandem, there can be an increase in the energy put into self-preservation and blame avoidance (Sidman, 1989). Of interest to us is the contrast between a predominant organizational story of organization-as-machine, where emotions are counterproductive to the smooth running of the machine, and a reliance on emotions to achieve motivation for change. This confusion is frequently expressed in the metaphors used about raising motivation during

organizational change, many of which contain violent images of pain and fear. We are thinking particularly of such popular motivating images as ‘the burning platform’ and ‘holding their feet to the fire’ (Welch and Byrne, 2001).

Belief in the head and body organizational split

Machines need controlling mechanisms. Therefore, if organizations are machines, so do organizations. Within the organization-as-machine metaphor organizations can be seen to consist of control processes and performance processes. In Taylor’s model the separate and complementary roles of manager and worker reflect this division: the managers provide the controlling mind while the workers perform. This clear distinction between the two roles also owes a lot to the 17th-century philosopher René Descartes and his work on the relationship between the physical body and the Godly soul.

Descartes introduced the idea of the mind/body split as a way of ‘solving’ the question of the relationship between the ethereal mind (or soul) and the physical body. He suggested that the body was essentially like a machine, while the mind possessed the controlling processes. Understanding the relationship this way means that to make my arm move I must first think of moving my arm. The body cannot move independently of a controlling process (a thought) in the mind (Wikipedia, 2007). This understanding of the distinct and different nature of the two entities has been highly influential in Western thinking. The mind is seen as the seat of all that is rational and logical, while the body’s true role is to obey the mind like a machine. Incidentally, the bodily ‘passions’ are seen as temporary dysfunctions that can have a disruptive effect on the mind. It is this understanding of the body as a machine that links Cartesian thinking to organizational functioning.

We don’t have to look at organizational functioning too hard to see how this Cartesian dualism thinking continues to influence relationships in the workplace between those who see themselves as the organizational ‘mind’, licensed to direct and control the body, and those in the body of the organization, who are expected to do no more or less than they are directed. This understanding of the two roles is often left unchallenged during organizational change. It is taken as read that the managers will do the thinking and will design the new control processes, while the workers are expected, like the body of the machine, to perform as directed. This duality is further reflected in the belief in the linear sequencing of thinking and doing, these

activities being seen as separate, mutually exclusive and to follow each other sequentially. So first the managers do the thinking about, and planning of, what to do, then the workers implement the plan.

Belief in the power of separating elements to enhance clarity and so the ability to act efficiently

Organizations are keen to reduce complex phenomena to more manageable elements in the belief that this will help them act more efficiently. To this end a complex change project is broken down into a sequence of manageable activities. A typical change sequence might start: establish the nature of the problem; gather data about the problem and some current state information; agree what change is required and how it will be measured; discuss the success criteria; decide what to do; draw up an implementation plan; and communicate said plan. To some extent this separating out and sequencing of the elements can be seen as a way of trying to impose some simplicity, some order, upon a chaotic world. It offers a way to concentrate on one thing at a time. As a way of introducing order and reducing complexity, this approach has merit. The trouble is that the idea of thinking about one thing at a time slides imperceptibly into a belief that only one thing is happening at a time, the thing we are thinking about.

So while helpful for introducing order, these beliefs can also become a hindrance as they direct our attention towards one thing at the expense of our awareness of another. Looking only at the thing we are doing we miss the other things that are happening simultaneously. For instance, focused on the data we are gathering, we fail to observe that the very issue about which we are gathering data is changed by our data-gathering activity. Sending out staff surveys isn't just data collection; the very activity impacts on the engagement, satisfaction and expectations of individuals. Making an appointment to see a coaching client is not just something that we do 'before' we meet the client, it is part of the relationship-building and contracting process. In our quest to make the world understandable, and specifically to make change manageable, we have a tendency to make the issue small enough, and simple enough, to fit the resource (the brains) brought to the task. In a complex situation it might be more productive to find a way to bring sufficient brains together to encompass the complexity of the task.

Belief in a 'right answer' to the problem of design

An understanding of the organization-as-machine carries with it the idea of 'perfectibility' or ultimate design. In other words, there is an inherent suggestion in this way of thinking that there will be a 'right answer' to the question of 'how best to organize ourselves'. It is this, often unspoken, belief that prompts leaders and managers to adopt one organizational design after another. They do this in the hope that this one will be 'the answer' and that they can then cease the quest for 'the answer' and all the change that entails and just 'get on' with running their organization. Even as they acknowledge that change is now an organizational constant, people can continue their search for the ultimately adaptive design, not appreciating that by definition this is unachievable.

Summary

In this chapter we have presented an analysis of some of the assumptions about organizational change that follow from the conceptualization of the organization as a machine. We have suggested that the emergence of the story of organization-as-machine is connected to the creation of the limited liability joint stock company as a legal entity. We have noted that this story had terrific resonance at the time of the Industrial Revolution, when the power of science, machine and technology was in the ascendant. Our interest has been in the observation that this metaphor of organization-as-machine continues to be a powerful, if frequently unacknowledged, story in organizational life. We have also noted that some of the puzzling and sometimes paradoxical things that organizations do can be related to this prevalent belief about the nature of organizations. We have spelled this out in some detail so that the alternative understanding offered by a view of organizations as living human systems, as explored in the rest of this book, can be seen more clearly. The next chapter will follow the same process of introducing the perspective, identifying its underlying beliefs and then identifying the assumptions about organizational change that follow from it.