ONE OF THE THINGS WHICH IS OFTEN NOT PAID MUCH ATTENTION TO DURING PROCESSES OF CHANGE IS TO GIVE THE

PEOPLE INVOLVED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH THE CHANGE. MANY EMPLOYEES OF (LARGE) ORGANISATIONS

ARE TOLD WHAT IS GOING TO CHANGE AND HOW THIS WILL TAKE PLACE. THEY THEN HAVE ABSOLUTELY NO POSSIBILI-

TY OF GETTING INVOLVED WITH THE CHANGE, OF CONNECTING THE CHANGE WITH PERSONAL GOALS AND INTERESTS.

AT THE SAME TIME, VERY OFTEN THESE SAME EMPLOYEES ARE CRUCIAL TO ACHIEVING THE GOALS OF THE CHANGE: IT

INVOLVES THEIR BEHAVIOUR AND ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE CUSTOMER, THE NEW IT-SYSTEM, THE NEW ALLIANCE PART-

NER OR A NEW PRODUCT. IN THIS WAY WE ARE LOOKING AT CHANGE PROCESSES FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE INDI-

VIDUAL ACTORS. THUS, IMBUING THE CHANGE WITH MEANING AND CONNECTING THIS WITH PERSONAL GOALS AND

INTERESTS ARE THE STARTING POINTS REQUIRED FOR AN EMPLOYEE TO CHOOSE TO CHANGE HIS BEHAVIOUR AND ATTI-

TUDE – BECAUSE PEOPLE WILL NOT DO OR THINK DIFFERENTLY AGAINST THEIR WILL.

Change: the art of connecting

ROBERT VAN NOORT AND ARNE GILLERT

We are proposing that the art of change lies in the art of con-necting. An organisation that wants to change needs to connect this change to the personal motives of employees. Connecting is however not simple and frequently paradoxical; it often means letting go.

People responsible often use phrases such as searching for com-mon interests in order to give legitimacy to a change. The dis-advantage of this approach is that formulating common interests leads to compromises. People give up what they themselves find important. Looking for common interests results in the final goal often not being reached (Boonstra, 2000). It is not the work-ing on common interests which contributes to bringing the change nearer but rather the connecting of different interests within mutual final goals.

Indeed, by connecting the strengths of the different interests rather than making compromises, a change will be more quickly accepted and realised.

A HANDLE ON THE CHANGE PROCESS

The successful change consultant is mindful of the content of the change as well as of the process which leads up to it. The change model below helps to bring order into designing the change.

This change model assumes that two things must be achieved:

1. Acceptance of the fact that change will take place and partic-ipation in it (process).
    This first point has to do with employees who are involved in the change accepting that their work will change. People realise that the work which they will carry out next week will be different to the work which they carried out last week.
2. Ultimately thinking and acting differently (content);
    This second point has to do with employees accepting that the work is developing in the direction of the final goals. The employees actually change their own thinking and actions in this direction.

The next question which arises is how this can be achieved. Or, in other words, how does a change consultant go about his work?
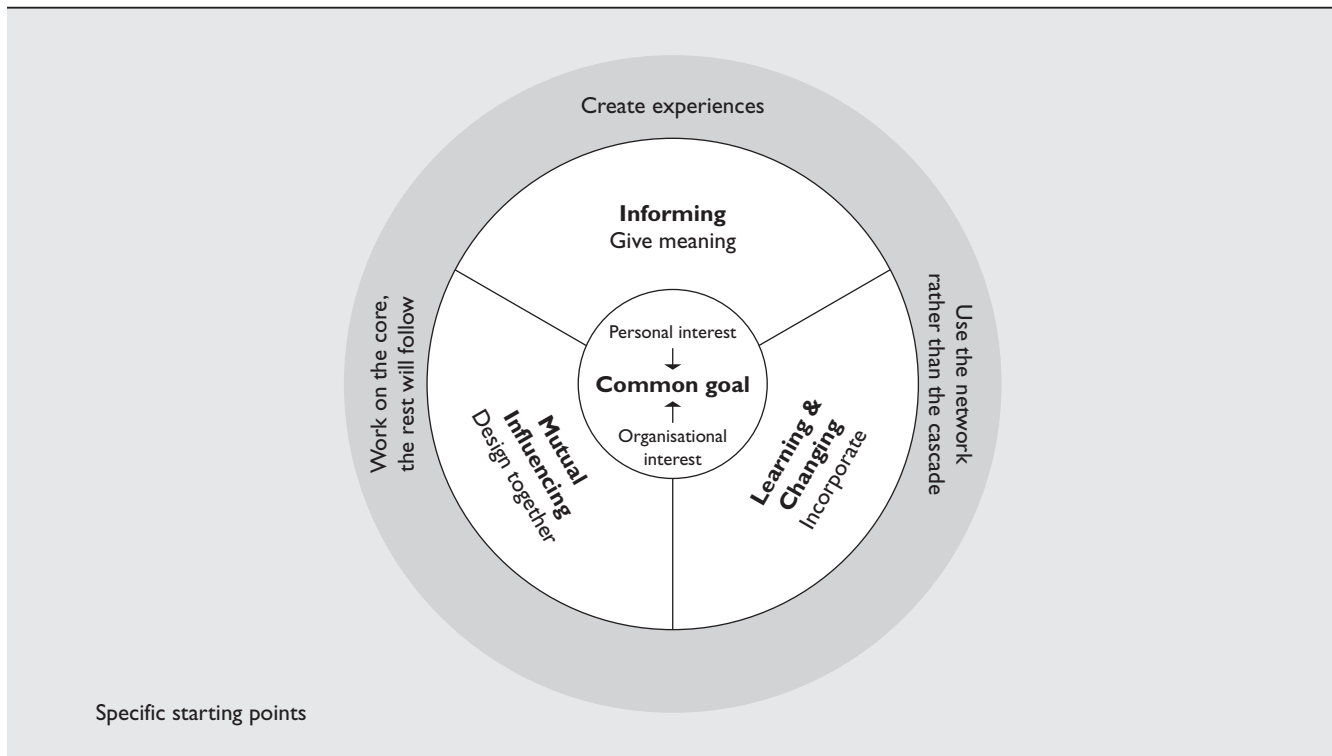
The centre of the model shows how personal interests and company interests can be connected together with a shared final goal. We order the change activities according to three aspects:

1. Informing and enabling employees to digest and give meaning to the information.
2. Allowing space for mutual influencing so that employees take part in shaping the change.
3. Offering employees possibilities to learn and change and to incorporate the change.

These three aspects are essential to making a change really take root. But it is not enough. We think that the following three principles determine the three aspects. They give direction to how various interventions are formed:

1. Create experiences: Every action within the framework of the change process is interpreted by people as a message about the change. Just as non-verbal communication is often more powerful than verbal communication, employees will believe what they experience far more than what they have only heard. It is important to consciously design interventions as 'prototypes of the future': they are naturally out of the ordinary and create a first, positive experience of a possible future.

2. Work on the core, the rest will follow: By concentrating on a small number of critical situations, speed and focus emerge.
3. Use the network rather than the cascade: Change is a personal process which cannot be delegated. That is why it is fitting to work from a network in which a critical mass ultimately evolves so that the change takes root.

The change model above (fig. 1) illustrates these ideas schematically.

We think that these elements of the change model are generally valid. In addition, it is necessary to make the approach specific to the content aims of the change. That can be done by formulating supplementary principles which mirror the content. For instance, in the case of a merger aiming to develop synergies through closer co-operation, 'co-designing' is an example of a powerful principle supporting the goal of the change. An employee can experience 'positive working together' with each change intervention.

We will now examine the change model more closely by looking at the elements involved: connecting interests, the three activities: informing, mutual influencing and learning & changing, and the three principles of 'Create experiences', 'Work on the core, the rest will follow' and 'Use the network rather than the cascade'.

Connecting interests

'The team interest takes precedence' can sometimes still be heard in teams. Decisions are made in the name of the team interests that many team members either do not support at all or support only barely. The same goes for the expression "the company interest takes precedence"; just wait for the criticism to swing through the corridors, When the team leaders recognise their interests in the team interests, they will more quickly accept and carry out decisions which have been made in the name of the team interests. This is an important reason to pay a lot of attention to personal interests in team processes.

In the same way that it works in team processes, it also works in change processes in organisations. 'The final goal takes precedence' is what is then proclaimed. And it's the same old story again. What applies to change processes is that a basis for support is created when the personal interests of employees are linked with the final goal. We can achieve that by allowing employees to have an influence on the final goal and by recognising and integrating these personal interests.

We then get to a difficult point. When, as a change consultant, you allow employees to have influence on the final goal, this means that you allow employees to have influence on determining results based on that final goal. However, this is often difficult because the one who has commissioned the change wants, for instance with respect to predictability and control, to determine beforehand as precisely as possible what the results will be.

We achieve more by designating the final goal as a framework and direction and by inviting employees on the basis of their professional skills, expertise and interests to determine their own results. Often, the results which are then described do not differ much from what the initiators of the change originally envisaged.

Imagine that the organisation has the ambition to work more closely with the consumer in order to better understand what his wishes are. The result of this can be defined in various different ways:
- all sales-managers are working with one CRM-(customer relations management) system;
- we have differentiated our three top products over the various target groups;
- the market share of young consumers has increased by 3%.

Example: From personal interests to team interests

A director of an international supply-chain organisation in fast-moving consumer goods asks us to assist in strengthening the team. He thinks that the various team members do not sufficiently support the team interest. Even outward-bound activities can be considered, (!) What is going on? The demand for his products in the United States has dropped considerably due to an aggressive advertising campaign from his major competitor. This leads to enormous tension in the team. One of the production managers wants to integrate the smaller subsidiary (with its own brand) in his plans in order to nevertheless reach his production goals. The logistics manager who is suddenly sitting with enormous inventories wants the sales group to offer discounts; then the fresh product does not need to be destroyed or kept longer. The sales department is not keen because it has agreed on ambitious margins in their management contract. The purchaser finds his next career move being hampered because he can't make use of bulk-buying and thus misses the corresponding cost savings. In previously similar situations, the supply-chain director altered his management contract together with the individual team member. This had not led to postponing the problems in the mutual working together. We worked together with the team members under the daring motto: 'own interest first'. Each team member was given the room to sketch his own personal questions, his ambitions and goals to be reached in his work. These were detailed discussions in which one team member was put in the spotlight each time. After some initial hesitancy, the team members listened to each other's stories and automatically started to work together on thinking up the best strategy for that particular team member. Each member was extensively heard and supported in his interests. People also knew that they would themselves be given sufficient opportunity to bring up their own points. The paradox was that by doing this, people did not lose sight of the team interest but automatically wove it into the various new solutions. Besides an enormous involvement with each other's situations, a shared sense of crisis arose which led to a daring plan of attack. People had learnt from each other's approach and interests and based on that, they set out on a new and, what later appeared to be, successful direction.

These different results can all contribute to the earlier mentioned goal. Indeed, different experts (such as marketing professionals, IT-specialists or product developers) work on the results from their own specialisations. They have a personal interest in achieving the goal. The task is to recognise, to incorporate and subsequently to integrate and realise these personal interests in the plan, expressed in different result definitions. By allowing the interested parties to determine their own adapted results one lets go of one's own blueprint for the change, and creates space for professional skills, with the corresponding commitment.

A change consultant thus facilitates the connecting of interests. In this process, it is only when someone begins to make his own interests transparent and then goes in search of the interests of others, that a supported goal emerges. So the first step is to invite employees to make their interests known. This works best if the one who is expressing his interests links this to making his intentions clear about what he wants to do: "My interest as manager is to show how innovative a department we can be. I think that we do not always fully make use of our potential. That is why I want to see how I can help or stimu-

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An oil company has an internationally composed IT-team. The task of this team has changed quite drastically. Instead of developing state-of-the-art systems, the team is told that it must cut costs by purchasing, amongst other things, proven technology on which the development costs have already been earned back. For a number of team members this is unbearable; precisely there where their interest lies to be in pursuit of the newest of the new, they must now carry out research into what already works and how smartly this can be purchased. By carrying out a number of discussions with each other and with their leaders about how this changed goal brings the various interests in conflict, some team members decide to leave this department and to put their talents to use elsewhere. A number of others see the possibility of combining innovation with broadening themselves in the IT-field. They use the new goal to develop themselves in buying and implementing systems. Within a month, the positions have become clear and people can begin to realise the goal. In this situation it was not possible to line up all the employees behind the new goal. However, there were no delays and also the departing employees were well supported in finding a new workplace outside the oil company. In this way the relationship was not damaged.

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late all of us as a department to get innovative projects off the ground." Our experience is that an interest which is connected to something you want to do (action), is far more likely to invite dialogue than an interest without action: it merely remains an opinion or a judgement ("We should show how innovative we are as a department") which is not very inviting at all.

For the one who initiates a change it is essential to want to understand and recognise someone else's interests. In order to do this, one's own interests must temporarily take second place. This temporary letting go can often feel insecure. Feeling insecure has a huge advantage: it makes you alert and sensitive. Insecurity allows us to better empathise with the employee who is experiencing a similar insecurity. As an adult, it is difficult to still feel how it is to be an adolescent. In the same way it is difficult for a change consultant to feel the insecurity of the employees in a change process when to the change consultant the final goal and his own interests are obvious.

Informing

In many organisations change is the same as informing. There will be many employees who by now have become 'used to' the linear change model which involves merely informing and then implementing. Many of these will (probably for this very reason) feel honoured when their expertise is called on for the change. Informing is the first step for this. How do we present information about the change?

How do we create room for feedback? Which information is necessary to understanding the content of the change and also to wanting it? Which information do our employees need to support the changes? And, perhaps the most essential question; how do we support our employees so that they are able themselves to answer the question of what the change means for them personally.

'Informing' in this change model means making it possible for people to interpret the information. What you actually say is: 'This is what we want. Let's see what this means for you, and then I would very much like to know whether you want to get to work with it?' In this way space is made for people to accept and carry the changes through. Already by giving information, the personal interests of the employees are existing alongside those of the organisation. One takes employees seriously if there is an opportunity to investigate how the two interests are related to each other.

Mutual Influencing

When employees are not given any room to influence the change, they organise the space for themselves. People then often exert influence in a negative way: "If they won't take any notice of my opinion then don't expect me to still put in overtime here". "If I suddenly have to check tickets more stringently, I will simply walk through the train less frequently and then I will also get less aggression".

Learning is not only a change in skills. In change processes, learning is also the changing of convictions.

We can see how the pocket veto phenomenon (Hanson, 1996) comes into play: saying one thing and doing another. Rapid decision-making is boycotted by people calling out: "I did everything I could but I couldn't get the people together".

Often, the influence is then formally organised. Employee councils and workers unions and all sorts of employee-focus groups are meant to represent the voice of the larger group. These formal ways of influence defend interests – and not necessarily those of the individual employee. As we already proposed, it is of essential importance for everyone to individually connect interests to the common goal. We see that the fight over collective interests leads to many procedures and losers on both sides. For us it is a fact that employees want to influence change. Nine times out of ten, they want this because of their experience, ideas and expertise and not because of their position. Precisely for this reason we want to provide space for using this potential in the change process.

When we organise mutual influencing, we need a very good understanding of people's motives. Motives explain why people do the things they do. The motives of employees determine also how they influence changes.

The motives people have are rooted in their identity. Motives form the basis for the beliefs and interests of employees. It is therefore very important to get an image of the motives of the stakeholders involved in the change process. Creating such an overview can be a good preparation for a dialogue: for each stakeholder list what you think the personal interests and motives are and how these may be connected to a common goal.

Mutual influencing hereby has a double function, regarding the content of the change, and the change process. Where motives are translated into interests, it is about finding or constructing a shared goal, the content. Where motives are translated into beliefs or norms, these are often less explicit. It is difficult to have a dialogue about these beliefs and norms – one doesn't just lightly question someone else's norms. These can only be discussed on a basis of trust. And norms only change when good alternatives are possible. Mutual influencing then has a signal function in the change process: I am being heard.

If the organisation recognises employees' interests, employees will also more easily recognise the legitimacy of the interests of the organisation. If, based on possibly different interests, employees and managers go in search of areas where mutual ground can be created, then they have actually already started with changing. The creation of a shared goal based on individual and organisation interests is the basis for every change pathway.

Learning & changing

We reserve the word 'learning' for people and not for the organisation. In this context we use the concept 'changing' for the organisation. This applies then to the changing of the structure, the merging or dismantling of departments, and so on.

The consequence of a change is usually that the organisation modifies its system as well as that the employees have to learn new skills. Here too it is so that the modifications and new skills only work when the different interests have been incorporated into the goal. The real power of the employee lies of course in not carrying out the change. There are countless examples imaginable where employees, for instance by striking, enforce concessions or block reorganisations by simply not participating. Learning works therefore only if the skills are in line with the interests and motives of the employees. Learning is not only a change in skill. In change processes, learning is often more deeply rooted, namely the changing of beliefs. When employees go to work at that level with the change and search for connections with personal interests, then they are busy incorporating the change. In learning processes it is important that employees feel the need to learn. This can mean that they will feel uncomfortable in the beginning. When our personal interests are stimulated, then we go into action.

An important question in learning & changing is: what do you as manager have to offer to the change process? If you want acceptance, what can you offer? An example would be the possibility for the employee to develop himself. This does not then necessarily even have to involve the continuity of the function.

Example: experiencing the future at Heineken Italia

Heineken Italia wanted to get closer to the consumer with its commercial organisation – to respond better to what was happening both in the supermarkets as well as in the bars and other places of consumption. An entire plan was worked out in a project which also included the introduction of Customer Relations Management (CRM). At the same time, the new approach demanded a new way of thinking and acting from the commercial employees: from salesman to advisor, from supplier to partner. But not everyone was looking forward to these changes; many people were afraid that these changes were really a masked reorganisation.

Based on the principle of 'actions speak louder than words', we initially worked towards a concrete change which we could put into practice in the commercial department. The question was then: how can you already experience an onset of the future together, and how can you ensure that this is a positive experience? We chose the upcoming convention as the moment to change: 300 employees were traditionally completely pampered in a beautiful spot in Europe, and in-between, presentations were given by management. What does such a convention look like if you design it according to the principles which govern the change? And how does the convention become more a part of work and not just a separate outing?

CONVENTION

With a team of commercial managers and employees, we together designed a convention in which working in partnership was central, based on the processes of the change model. An old hangar for aeroplanes in Milan served as location to work on the change: by giving meaning to it, by shaping it together, and by already starting to incorporate aspects of the change in new behaviour. Managers acted as partners of employees. No more presentations, but rather discussions and design sessions.

We structured the space in the hangar according to the three activities of the change model: informing, mutual influencing and learning & changing. Two self-designed workshops were offered per section: Under informing: 'Why must we change?' and 'What does the change mean for me?' Under mutual influencing: 'What do you think of this change?' and 'What tools do you need?' And under learning and changing: 'Actively working together' and 'Dealing with emotions in changes'. The teams from the various regions and the head office decided amongst themselves who would take part in which workshops and communicated the results back to each other. There was thus room for personal connection with the change, but we also emphasised the role played by the teams in the daily work. There was a lot of room for individual input and informal discussions with each other. The convention seemed to hit the nail on the head: a great deal of energy was created to get to work with the change. Much of the anxiety was transformed into involvement.

EVALUATION

We evaluated the convention together with the management team and went in search of starting points for the subsequent change process. Which aspects worked? On what do we base the design of our following interventions? A list with six principles emerged (for instance, 'practice what you preach'). And a list was drawn up of critical situations in the change process, moments which provide the opportunity to bring the change into practice.

One such core situation was for instance the introduction of a toll-free telephone number. Together with everyone involved, we developed what the new work process would look like and how we could best introduce this. There was a lot of concern with the sales representatives that they would lose control over contact with their clients. The telephonists recognised these concerns, invited the sales rep's and involved them in the introduction of the toll-free number. They showed their work processes and made agreements about how the sales rep's could stay well informed about what was arranged via the telephone. The number was introduced in phases per region so that lessons could be learned from experience and a network could emerge of people who accepted the new way of working.

Create experiences

All interventions in change processes are experiences that employees link to the change. These interventions in fact are the only tangible experiences of the change available, since the change is about something that is not there yet.

For many employees, these experiences are the touchstone for the intentions of management which plans a change. Is the behaviour of the managers consistent with what they are preaching about the change? It seems obvious but is often forgotten in change processes: actions speak louder than words. People will not change their actions solely on the basis of arguments. You make it easier for employees to choose to change when your intervention in the here-and-now is a way of experiencing the changed future: a positive representation of how you dream the future in your change plans.

Work on the core, the rest will follow

It is often difficult at the beginning of a change process to make a connection between the change goals which have been formulated on an abstract level and the concrete meaning which these goals have for the individual actors. What, in concrete terms, does the change look like in practice?

One of the ways of making change processes concrete is by working with core situations. The idea of the core situation has been borrowed from the 'critical incident method' (Flanagan 1954, Marsick 2001). You go in search of those concrete work situations which are crucial to the success of the change. You ask: imagine that you can only change 4-5 situations in which people will think and act differently. With which situations do you then reach the core of your changes? Where does the essence of what the change is about become visible?

All actors can ask themselves this question individually. And then you can focus your change interventions upon developing the desired changes in these situations. By dealing with the core, the rest eventually changes along with it.

Use the network instead of the cascade

We already stated it at the beginning that this perspective on change is actor-focused. We are using the word 'personal' quite a bit. You could ask yourself if you can shape such a personal process when hundreds, if not thousands of people are involved. It may then seem impossible to make connections with everyone individually, especially as representation does not work, and to create a common goal. And if thousands must have influence, does this influence not become immediately unrecognisably tiny? Are we going to vote on organisational strategy?

The difficulty is that the process of creating a common goal and of meaningful experiences of the future remains an utterly personal process. In scaling up this process then it doesn't help to think in terms of the cascade model (the process gradually trickles down through the organisational hierarchy). Rather, we

Example: change by core situations in an Independent Government Agency

This organisation needed to fulfil an entirely new role as an Independent Government Agency. The key issues for the organisation were to be more externally directed, more integrated and to operate more independently in an environment which was of itself also very much in flux. The management team had been newly appointed and had the ambition of constructing the future together with the employees.

Each manager formulated his own core situation(s): how can I shape the core of what the change is about for me? There were also common core situations: an example was the weekly consultation which took place in the management team.

This consultation became one of our first points of attention. The team wanted to prove its role in the change by being decisive as a large group without making compromises and by cre-

ating speed. This required skills and a new way of thinking from everyone. How do you explore the interests of another? How do you introduce your own interests? How can you connect these interests with a common goal? And how do you facilitate others in such a process if the subject doesn't happen to really move you?

By working together on the core situations in "MT-consultation" a more decisive team emerged. At the same time, the work provided insights for everyone which were essential to the entire change process: how you facilitate connections of interest with your employees, what your own patterns are in such a process. And it was an experience of success which generated energy. We succeeded in reorganising the MT differently and in developing as a team.

can approach this challenge from the perspective of networking. The underlying idea is that we concentrate on two things: firstly on creating small-scale environments, oases, in which we are shaping the change by assuming now already the new identity or profile of the future organisation which then makes room for a common goal.

Secondly by ensuring connections between these groups and once the groups are stable, between other people and these

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People that work in another culture become increasingly aware that they do nog react adequately.

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groups. In recent research which has been carried out into networking, it has been shown that powerful organisations evolve indeed by introducing new cross-connections in networks and not by following a hierarchical line (Watts 2004, Barabási 2003) The moment that there are small 'oases' where the change has already been realised and other people come into contact with them, social processes come into play which you can compare to working in other cultures: suddenly another reality exists alongside one's own self-evident reality. And what an employee experiences in such a change process strongly resembles the process of culture shock and how coming into contact with the new reality can change one's perspective.

A change consultant can speed up the change process by facilitating this 'culture shock'. Whoever works in another culture is increasingly aware that he does not react adequately (Bennett 1993, Grove & Torbiörn 1993). The way of thinking and acting is different to what the environment expects. Many habits which seem normal are no longer self-evident. If others allow someone in such a situation the space to deal with the emotions which accompany the culture shock and facilitate connections between the 'old' and the 'new' world, then people quickly learn to function within the new reality. Just think about how quickly new employees adjust themselves to the company culture.

In Conclusion

The appreciation of the change can be a long time coming. When Royal Dutch Philips introduced the compact disc, few people were interested. There were complaints from all sides: 'What am I supposed to do with my LPs?' or 'I don't yet have a CD-player'. That is quite difficult to imagine in an era when everyone has CDs and is by now loading them onto his MP3-player.

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