WHAT MAKES IT SO IMPORTANT FOR YOU TO READ THIS ARTICLE? WHAT DRIVES YOU TO OPEN THIS EDITION OF DEVELOP AND LEARN MORE ABOUT ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE AND LEARNING? WHAT ARE YOUR MOTIVES FOR SPENDING TIME ON DISCUSSING THESE TOPICS? SOMEHOW YOUR ACTIONS BENEFIT YOU IN SOME WAY. YOU MIGHT BE EAGER TO LEARN ABOUT ORGANISATIONAL CHANGE OR YOU WANT TO ACQUIRE IDEAS IN ORDER TO PUT THEM INTO PRACTICE. IT MIGHT BE JUST YOUR FASCINATION FOR LEARNING THAT MAKES YOU ENJOY READING AND TALKING ABOUT IT.

Connecting interests in organisational change

Last year's journey through theory, research and practice

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My interest in writing this article is that I enjoy sharing my ideas about human behaviour and the results of my research. Besides, the interviews I held in order to write this article helped me to sharpen my own ideas and gave me the ability to learn from professionals in the field. That's why I am motivated to contribute to the realisation of this article. The people who supported me during the realisation of this article all had their personal motives for contributing to this process. Nevertheless, our goal was clear: make a product which is interesting and enjoyable to read.

I imagine that this mechanism of working on a common goal from your personal interest also functions during organisational change processes. As Porter and Lawler (1968) argued, both a person's attitude towards an organisational change and his subsequent behaviour stem from a process by which the perceived outcomes of a change are compared with this person's personal interests. This implies that for a change to be successful, people need to gain personal benefits while contributing to the common goal. Giving employees the possibility to realise personal ambitions through supporting the organisation's (change) goals seems therefore to be crucial in a change process.

With this idea in mind, I started a journey last summer by reading more about organisational change and individual drives and motives. Being very enthusiastic about this perspective, I decided to conduct my Masters research on this topic. Now that my research is completed, I am still eager to learn more about it. So in the light of this topic, I interviewed some professionals.

In this contribution I look back on my journey. I aim to answer the following three questions which led me through the landscape of connecting interests:

- On what theoretical fundaments can a research on connecting interests be based?
- What could forms of connecting interests be in behavioural terms and what beliefs facilitate this behaviour?
- How can we exert influence and intervene in order to make this strategy successful?

I regard the theoretical fundaments for research as forming my point of departure in this journey. I will discuss these first in this publication. Secondly, I will discuss the results of my Masters

research which I regard as the global exploration of the landscape of connecting interests. These results give an indication of different forms of connecting interests in behavioural terms and of the beliefs which facilitate this behaviour. I will then discuss my investigation of the landscape of connecting interests more thoroughly. I carried out this investigation by interviewing Arne Gillert, consultant at Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company and Pamela Boumeester, member of the Extended Board at The Netherlands Railways. I asked these professionals how they exert influence and intervene in order to make the strategy of connecting interests work successfully.

POINT OF DEPARTURE: THE CHANGE CIRCLE

Giving employees the possibility to realise personal ambitions through supporting the organisation's (change) goals is truly the heart of an approach to organisational change called the 'change circle' (Van Noort, 2005). The model, outlined in more detail in van Noort and Gillert's contribution in this publication, is a way of overcoming and even preventing resistance to change and to creating acceptance for it. Here, acceptance is a way of including and enabling multiple local realities in a different but equal relationship rather than increasing the likelihood of accepting someone else's decision. To achieve this, the change circle departs from the idea that people have a need to influence (change) processes anyway. Therefore the approach leaves space free for the people involved to exert influence based on what they find important, on what their interests are. Employees are then able to connect their personal interests to an organisation's goal. In my opinion, the approach of connecting interests is based on two lines of reasoning. Firstly, personal interests are the main drives for people to cooperate and proactively support organisational change processes. Secondly, people in organisations need to work on a common goal during a change process. Both these lines can be traced in the literature. I will outline them in more detail below together with the idea of connecting these two rationales.

Personal interests

Potential personal benefits are the motivators that drive people to achieve goals (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The premise that innate psychological needs are the basis for self-motivation is translated in more recent theoretical work into implications for learning, change and innovation processes. Kessels, Keursten, Verdonschot, and Van Rooij (2006) consider these personal interests to be a powerful motor for innovation that leads to curiosity, learning, energy, ownership, and responsibility. Keursten and Tjepkema (1997) consider personal interests and preferences as the driving force in the process of continuous and inspired knowledge creation.

Common goal

However, learning, changing and innovating are not possible when everyone merely aims to realise personal interests (Kessels, et al., 2006). Therefore, the second line of reasoning emphasises the importance of aiming for a common goal in change processes. As Senge (1990) argues: 'if any one idea about leadership has inspired organisations for thousands of years, it is the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create'. Pfeffer (1992) subscribes to this view by supposing that the way to get things done is to develop a strongly shared vision. According to him, if people share a common set of goals, a common perspective on how to accomplish it and a common vocabulary that allows them to coordinate their behaviour, then command and hierarchical authority are of much less importance.

Learning, changing and innovating are not possible when everyone merely aims to realise personal interests.

Connecting interests

Acknowledging that personal interests are an individual's main drives and that working on a common goal to implement an organisational change is a necessity, means that it is crucial to pay attention to both of these aspects during change processes. Lämsä and Savolainen (2000) argue that the goals of a company are important because through them personal benefits can be achieved. These theoretical notions seem to plead for an approach where personal and organisational interests go hand in hand without being the same. Rather than excluding one another, they can reinforce one another. Nevertheless, I often notice that when people talk about or deal with different interests, problems and barriers predominate. In reality it is apparently not always obvious to take the perspective of using and connecting interests in order to shape work relations.

On my journey, the above reasoning resulted in both new insights and questions. It convinced me more and more about the idea that personal interests form the strongest basis for all human actions, including changing. Furthermore, it seemed clear that opportunities exist to strive for personal interests while supporting an organisation's goal. On the other hand, these answers left me with new questions. If connecting interests is an effective approach to organisational change, then how may I be able to shape the process so that I can realise my personal interests by striving for the organisation's goal? What can I do to make this connection productive? And how do my beliefs and views about the world influence these kinds of behaviour?

Based on the above literature which I studied in the autumn of 2005, I considered that this perspective on organisational change was worth researching. In October, I met Jos Borremans at an international conference on organisational change. As HR manager at Volvo Cars Ghent, he told me that he was curious about how some line managers in his organisation were able to get plant workers on their side with respect to the changes in the organisation. These 'connectors', in his words, had a wide circle of employees around them who were committed to the change and motivated to contribute to it.

Dealing with different personal interests and relating these to the organisation's goals is a very commonplace thing.

GLOBAL EXPLORATION OF THE LANDSCAPE: RESEARCH ON BEHAVIOUR AND BELIEFS

From that moment we connected our interests. We decided to conduct my Masters research at Volvo's plant in Belgium based upon our common curiosity about how this way of interacting, this way of building partnerships to achieve goals, works in practice. Borremans' idea was to shape organisational processes so that the teams and employees in the plant were able to work autonomously by taking responsibility for themselves and for more than just the production process. My interest was to get answers to my questions which I could put into practice. Besides, I wanted to conduct an interesting research on which I could write a valuable master thesis. Our goal was to learn more about at least two aspects of the process of connecting interests. Firstly, we wanted to know what strategies people use to connect personal interests to a common goal. Secondly, we were interested in the motives and underlying beliefs which make people seek out this connection.

The organisation

Since the introduction of self-managing teams in 1989, Volvo Cars Ghent has been continuously changing towards a work environment where teams and employees work more autonomously. From the first moment I walked into the plant and had conversations with managers and assembly-line workers, I noticed that the desire to work autonomously and to have responsibility for more than just the production process was a priority for all involved in the company. At the same time, I noticed that managers and assembly-line workers all struggled with this concept of autonomy. I suppose that this is related in the first place to ideas about the concept of autonomy. As Dewulf, Grotendorst and Joliet (2004) describe, it is a fallacy that autonomy is mainly about individualism. And in the second place, the fact that Volvo Cars Ghent is a production environment, where strict regulations determine daily work practices, produces tension. The continuous search for balance between managing a production process and the desire and belief that autonomy will foster learning and benefit both individuals and the organisation made Volvo Cars Ghent an interesting environment for conducting this research on connecting interests.

Strategies to connect interests

Nevertheless, while talking with several managers about their experiences in dealing with both employees' interests and Volvo Cars Ghent's goals, we discovered that dealing with different personal interests and relating these to the organisation's goals is a very commonplace, everyday thing. These managers reported that this is a perspective which they have never really thought about and discussed. By asking them explicitly about their experiences, we found out that experiences with connecting interests were not at all scarce. This allowed us to exchange successful cases regarding connecting interests. Reflecting together on these experiences resulted in some strategies which could supposedly contribute to the connecting of interests. In addition, we discovered some kind of sequence in the strategies.

According to the participants, acknowledging someone's interests is a necessary point of departure in the process of connect-

ing. In the example one manager gave during the session, he interrupted one of his employees who was constantly criticising the points his team-leader made. Instead of reprimanding this person, the manager showed appreciation for his critical attitude. He invited him to discuss this after the meeting. The employee accepted this request and later intimated that he felt taken seriously. By discussing this example we found out that acknowledging someone's interests as well as acknowledging the fact that everyone is 'allowed' to have a personal interest is the basis for a relationship where people are able to work on what they find important. Another important feature of this strategy is to make this acknowledgement explicit, to put it into words. Letting the other person know you acknowledge his interests will strengthen the connection.

But what if someone is not able to put into words what he finds important? This question came up during our group discussion.

Letting the other person know you acknowledge his interests will strengthen the connection between the two.

One participant indicated that he had experienced a situation where he had had a conversation with an employee about his functioning. This employee did not seem to know what his own drives and interests were. Then the manager reopened the conversation by asking him what his passions and ambitions were. This question released all the tension from the interaction. By continuing to ask more specifically, the employee was able to name his interests very clearly: he loved to work accompanied by colleagues and he found it important to be able to observe the results of his work. Later he was able to formulate his ambition. He wanted to work in another part of the plant where his job would be assembling instead of painting the cars. He later revealed that he was happy that he had finally discovered what he really found important in his work. Apparently, this is strongly connected to passions and ambitions. As a result of this case, the participants in the research concluded that helping someone find passions and ambitions is important in the process of connecting interests.

Up to this point, the strategies mainly addressed the relational basis on which the Volvo managers wanted to work. As far as action was concerned, they indicated that it is important for people to feel that they are the owner of what they are doing. During the session, one manager gave an example of a situation where an assembly-line worker submitted a proposal for improving a part of the production process. Instead of thanking the employee for the proposal and executing the plan, the manager first complimented the worker for his ability to compile such a smart proposal. Then he asked him whether he would like to put the idea into practice himself and whether he needed any assistance. The employee received this invitation with a smile and said he would love to execute his plan together with an expert. He later revealed that he was very happy and proud to be enabled by his manager to work on his plan. The participants in the research session named this strategy to connect interests 'encouraging personal ownership'.

In the process of acknowledging someone's interests, helping someone find passions and ambitions and encouraging personal ownership, the participants reported two activities which contributed to success in the process of connecting interests: reflecting and networking. According to them, reflecting from time to time is part of taking people seriously. The participants considered it as a way of helping people realise what they want to achieve personally whilst taking into account the organisation's interests. Networking and maintaining relationships seemed to be a condition for putting effort into a process of connecting interests. According to the participants, having a good relationship with people makes it easier to achieve goals together which serve the interests of multiple parties. This relationship lowers the barrier to approaching people and discussing their interests.

After this energetic and dynamic session where we exchanged successful cases concerning connecting interests, my feelings were divided. On the one hand, I was very satisfied with the outcomes regarding one aspect of the process of connecting interests. Now I knew which strategies could be successful in the process of connecting interests. On the other hand, I felt I had made the second question even weightier. I had seen that these managers were striving to connect interests but what were their motives and underlying beliefs for doing so? What made it so important for these people to behave in the ways they did? I realised that I had not come any closer to an answer to this question and decided to coax my participants into doing an interview with me about this. All the participants told me that they would love to do this because they had learned so much from the previous research intervention. I felt we had succeeded here in connecting interests: practice what you preach!

Strategies for connecting interests

- acknowledging someone's interests
- helping someone find passions and ambitions
- encouraging personal ownership
- reflecting
- networking

Beliefs underlying connecting behaviour

By reflecting on cases which we had discussed before, the participants succeeded during the interviews in making explicit their beliefs underlying this 'connecting behaviour'. Whilst the managers were fully aware of some of these beliefs, others were less obvious to them. The types of beliefs were very diverse. Some placed emphasis on people's abilities: for example, 'I find it important to value my operators based on their expertise, not on their position'. Others had to do with feelings of responsibility: for example, 'It is my task as a manager to motivate employees to think along about how to design the job'. Again others stressed the importance of making ideas explicit: 'Everyone views the same situation differently, therefore it is important to talk about our interpretations'. Many participants were conscious of the importance of being transparent about their personal interests: 'I must be clear towards my operators about what's important for me'. Less obvious, but not of less importance, was the other person's interest: for example, 'I find it important to facilitate my operators in their personal development'.

The conclusion I drew after interviewing these managers was that beliefs which underlie connecting behaviour mainly emphasise mutuality in relationships, cooperation, supporting others in their development, transparency, and mutual responsibility. Moreover, I noticed that beliefs which underlie connecting behaviour focus highly on the importance of both personal benefits and the organisation's benefits.

In addition to the successful cases, we discussed one case in the interviews where the participants had not succeeded in connecting interests. In this particular case, the manager had enforced personal norms on both himself and on the other person. Interestingly, underlying beliefs regarding this behaviour contained elements of intolerance to failures, ideas about what you or someone else should or should not do, as well as features of distrust, control and fear. An example of such a belief is: 'The chance of failures will be reduced if everyone just follows the rules'.

IN-DEPTH INVESTIGATION OF THE LANDSCAPE: AN INTERVIEW ON INTERVENTIONS

Now that I had conducted my research and written my Master thesis on connecting interests, I had a much better idea of how managers at an operational level connect interests and what beliefs they hold which guide this behaviour. To realise my ambition of gaining insight into how one can exert influence and intervene in order to make this strategy successful, I decided to continue my research activities. In order to find out what role high-level, strategic managers can play in this process and what change consultants can do to make the approach successful, I contacted two persons who closely matched my ideas about connectors. I approached my colleague Arne Gillert, consultant at Kessels & Smit, The Learning Company and Pamela Boumeester, member of the Extended Board at The Netherlands Railways. In an interview with these professionals, I presented my most important research results and explored the topic of connecting interests further. For me this small research resulted in some interesting insights into how we are able to shape the process of connecting interests.

Keep it personal

Using your personal interest as a starting point seems to be crucial in the process of connecting interests. According to Arne Gillert, everyone has personal interests. The trick is not to panic about this but rather to use these personal interests as the basis for a work relationship. In his work, he recently experienced the consequences of not connecting. Gillert: "In a group session with hospital managers, the objective was to make a start with the change process in the organisation. One of the participants con-

Examples of beliefs underlying the strategies

- 'I find it important to value my employees based on their expertise, not on their position'
- 'It is my task as a manager to motivate employees to think along about how to design the job'
- 'Everyone views the same situation differently, therefore it is important to talk about our interpretations'
- 'I must be clear towards my employees about what's important for me'
- 'I find it important to facilitate my employees in their personal development'

stantly formulated the other people's interests instead of expressing what he found important himself. This he did with good intentions. Nevertheless, the effect of his behaviour was that the other participants became suspicious." Gillert intervened in this tense situation by first describing what effect the participant's behaviour had on him personally. Then he asked the participant to use his personal interest as a starting point and to formulate this in a personal way. From the moment he followed this advice, the other participants' behaviour changed from reproaching the man for obscurity to a very investigative style. They were curious about his interests and the motives underlying these interests and started a dialogue in which everyone had a sincere wish to know from each other what they really found important. Gillert: "As a result, the group worked together on the future plans all based upon their personal interests."

Find out what is behind the ambition

I asked Pamela Boumeester whether she recognises the strategy of helping someone find passions and ambitions. She nodded and added that it is important to make the connection with the work. "For instance, you work for The Netherlands Railways and you say that your ambition is to be the most famous florist in Holland. This is not really our business." She continued by saying that people often voice their interests in a very definite way, as an ambition. "For me, it is then interesting to ask: how have you acquired this ambition, what is behind it and what is it about? Then you might find out that being a florist is just the form that you have chosen. It might be something else and the thing behind that might be interesting for the company. For example, you find it important to be service-oriented or to sell quality products." So in terms of skills, it is important for managers to ask the question behind the initial voiced interest; then you will be able to connect this to the organisation's goals.

Be specific and concrete

In my conversation with Boumeester, she did not react with surprise when I told her that 'encouraging ownership' was one of the strategies to connect interests I had discovered at Volvo Cars Ghent. She said: "In my opinion, people are themselves responsible for their development. Even if I want to, I can't do the things for you that you have to do yourself." As evident as this seems to be, in practice she experiences that some people have difficulties estimating the consequences of ownership. According to Boumeester, everyone wants to have ownership as long as it leads to success. She illustrated: "If the consequence of having a high salary is that you need to work 24 hours a day and you have not done this yet, you might say: 'yes, I want to do it'. But when you do it and you find out that you don't have time for anything else, then you might not be willing to take the consequences." As she explained further: "In these types of situations, it is important to be very specific. As a leader I try to explore the consequences together with others and make these very concrete and tangible. This kind of language helps them to consider their decisions. But then they are still the ones who are responsible."

Be action-oriented

Gillert agrees with Boumeester that encouraging ownership is important in the process of connecting interests. According to him, everyone is 'allowed' to have a personal interest. "From the moment you have an interest in someone else's ownership, then you are fundamentally equal." In the same session which he described earlier, he felt that something needed to be done to restore this equality. One participant repeated his opinion a number of times about what the organisation should do to be more innovative. By formulating his sentence like: 'What we should do is…', he actually was saying to the other participants: 'What you should do is…'. Gillert intervened by describing to the participant what effect this had and by asking him to formulate what he wanted to make clear in an action, something which he was able to do himself. After experiencing some difficulties with translating this perspective into his own words, the man succeeded in formulating an action he could undertake to contribute to the innovation processes in his organisation. He explicitly formulated this as something he found very important. Immediately the group reacted enthusiastically to his plan and some even offered to support him. Gillert: "Being action-oriented and formulating these actions very concretely, gives power to the connection."

From the moment you have an interest in someone else's ownership, then you are fundamentally equal.

DESTINATION SO FAR?

Looking back on my journey, I have seen a lot of interesting things and carried out a lot of exciting activities. But where has

this trip brought me? In the first place, the literature has helped me to sharpen and order my thoughts about connecting interests as an approach to organisational change. I have also discovered that many well-accepted theories are closely linked to my ideas about this approach. This has convinced me even more that connecting interests could be a valuable approach to dealing with people. In concrete terms, I now have much more of an idea about how the process of connecting interests could work. Acknowledging someone's interest explicitly, helping someone find passions and ambitions and encouraging ownership were not immediately what I had had in mind to start with. Nevertheless, since carrying out the research, I have often experienced that these strategies can be very helpful.

Something else I discovered on my journey was that consistency plays a central role in the success of connecting interests. That is, consistency between what an organisation desires to change, and how they want to achieve this. I call this principle the method is the message. For example, the approach of connecting interests is to a large extent consistent with Volvo Cars Ghent's vision: working in autonomous teams and with self-directing individuals. It shares basic principles like 'individual contributions are of added value for the company' and 'autonomy fosters personal development'. Based on my experiences, I conclude that this consistency provides a powerful boost for implementing a change successfully. I imagine that this power lies in the fact that stakeholders are able to trust you and your methods when confronted with the consistency. So change starts then by changing yourself and truly believing in it.

To conclude, I have learned that connecting interests is more than just applying some skills which lead to the realisation of both personal and organisational interests. In studying literature, conducting research and talking to 'connectors', I have come to view this increasingly as a way of looking at people, organisations and the world around me. This way of looking at the world represents more deeply rooted values; for example one's beliefs about power. By believing for instance that power relations are potentially cooperative, people are more likely to appreciate each other's individual contributions regardless of position. This I think relates strongly to what Kessels (2001) means with the concept of 'mutual attractiveness'. This is based on the premise that a relationship is only interesting for me when it is interesting for you. This means that the parties involved are themselves responsible for making cooperation attractive for both parties and for giving each other the opportunity to do what they find important. I think that these mutually attractive relationships can only be possible when the main focus is on development. This focus motivates an individual to put effort into building a relationship based on individual drives. In addition, development is only possible when you are able to act from your personal drives. That is what you can connect to. These insights stimulate me to continue my journey and to learn more about this approach.

I would like to thank the Volvo managers who participated with such dedication in my Masters research and I thank Pamela Boumeester and Arne Gillert for the captivating conversations and new insights with which they provided me.

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