Achieving Optimal Safety Results by Managing Change with Interpersonal Skills

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Introduction

To achieve your desired outcomes when interacting with others there are some aspects of human interaction that have to do with being attentive to detail in your communication and how you interact with others that can make a dynamic difference. In this regard it's not just how you conduct yourself that matters, it is understanding what is happening and managing your communication with others that can have the greatest impact. By focusing on a concept of "unplanned change" as well as some often unknown elements of change, I will provide a landscape of possibilities that can help you achieve optimal levels of achievement in your safety work. This paper also includes aspects of your personal actions that when used with these change principals, can amplify their effect.

Organizational Physiologist Dr. Jerry Perlmutter, NTL Professional, developed this unpublished theory of "unplanned change", a highly effective tool when used in obtaining desired results in a consultative, group or training setting. The additional aspects of communication and personal actions discussed are items that Dr. Perlmutter taught in group leadership training at the Institute in Organizational Dynamics at George Williams College and Aurora University.

Managing Change with Interpersonal Skills

This paper is about some often unnoticed aspects of communication, the precepts of the theory of "unplanned change" and how to use both of them effectively in achieving higher levels of safety results in your work. These often missed elements in the process of human interaction (e.g. feedback, disclosure, inclusion, outlook, group leadership competencies) and the precepts of "unplanned change" are the target of this discussion. I believe this will provide you with a clearer understanding of the nuances and subtleties that occur in our interaction with others that can be used to your advantage in your safety work.

By understanding how these aspects of communication and change work and applying them, you can better manage what is happening with others you are engaged with in the work setting (as well as in your personal lives). This can give you great advantage in your safety work and allow you to gain higher levels of achievement.

In the process of communication the following items are of great value to appreciate and understand:

- Giving feedback (What types of feedback to you tend to give? Which types of feedback to you tend to hold back?)
- Receiving feedback (What types of feedback to you tend to receive? Which types of feedback to you tend not to get?)
- More on feedback (What do you do to encourage feedback? What do you do to discourage the feedback you don't get?)
- Disclosure – The **Johari Window** (see exhibit A) is a very useful model in illustrating this aspect of human interaction
  – When we disclose, we open our PRIVATE box and our PUBLIC box grows
  – When we receive feedback, our PUBLIC box grows (our secret box may also be reveled in some circumstances)
  – The opportunity for growth is enhanced when we make our disclosure "here and now." So, when we are disclosing, the content should be "here and now" for us to gain the most from the situation
  – I believe disclosure to be healthy and it enhances our communications with others (however, self-disclosure of personal secrets such as: our sexual behavior, mental health problems or large-scale failures in a business setting is inappropriate).
  – As a leader you need to spend some time exploring disclosure to more clearly understand how it uncovers things about you that you are BLIND to, these are things that other know about you that you don't
- Inclusion - Also known as membership and belonging (What do you tend to do when you enter a group or situation? Do you have a style or method of entering? Is there consistency in your style or not, and is it situational? Do you feel you could benefit from a change in style of entering and use other patterns of behavior?)
- Outlook - A perspective is needed to discover how you interact with others. An outlook that encourages an open mind to adapt to and grow in the area of human interaction can be of great value in directing your efforts expand your horizons in this area. To this end I suggest the following practice with an outlook to learn from your encounters:
  – In safe settings, where there is trust to experiment with feedback, disclosure and inclusion, be open to expanding your private box, which will expand the choices that you have in the world.
  – In the real world, be strategic in the feedback you give, the feedback you encourage, and what you disclose about yourself.

Regarding the last item above, a working example of *Outlook* might be helpful, so I've provided a personal disclosure of how I used outlook to expand my horizons in a leadership setting. I created the following contract with myself as I entered the first organized and formal use of this material. The contract that I made was in preparation for the week I was a group facilitator in Jerry's institute, as follows:

- To learn and experience how I act and feel in a leadership role
- To learn and experience more about observing group process
- To learn and experience more about how to help myself and how to help others
- To hold my own with authority and stand up for myself
- To express anger when I feel it, to be more spontaneous with anger, and not worry about acceptance as much

Notice how my disclosure regarding *Outlook* opens up my PRIVATE box and intimates exploring various aspects of the **Johari Window** (see exhibit A). This self discovery process is important in understanding how I am when interacting with others, how others perceive me and what I can learn about myself to become more effective in my interactions with others. To most effectively utilize the material expounded on in this article, a positive and expanded *Outlook* is needed.

The following is provided as the context of where the theory of "unplanned change" comes from. It is designed to be applied in group leadership and in consultative setting by persons who know and have some understanding of it, but most importantly it can be used by you in your interactions with others at both work and in personal settings. It is derived from a shift in your awareness that goes from being externally focused to internally focused and back.

There are two group leadership competencies that are used in creating "unplanned change" that are expanded on in this article, which are two of sixteen that are central to this process of Group Leadership Training that are taught at the Institute in Organizational Dynamics. In and of them selves, these two competencies (#5 and # 11) are very powerful and are central to how unplanned change can be utilized (see exhibit B).

Group Leadership Competencies
1. Awareness and Assessment of Group Process
2. Awareness of self and limitations
3. Give good feedback and self disclosure
4. Clarity about and ability to contract for the purpose of design of a group experience
5. **Center / Contact flexibility**
6. Using and holding on to own power
7. Working knowledge of intrapsychic dynamics
8. Draws on group's resources, shares the leadership
9. Has and ethical framework
10. Ability and willingness to risk
11. **Participant / observer flexibility**
12. Getting into, using and managing conflict
13. Variety of interventions
14. Sees the effects of one's interventions
15. Knowledge of design possibilities
16. Caring and commitment to work with people

As stated previously, "unplanned change" occurs when a person shifts their awareness from being externally focused to internally focused and back. In the Group Leadership Competency list it is implied as a shift from Contact to Center and back to Contact labeled above as Center / Contact

flexibility. The same goes for the Participant / Observer flexibility which occurs when a person moves their orientation from actively participating (e.g. conversing, interacting with, actively listening etc.) to that of observing (e.g. taking note of behaviors, body language, expression, how others seem to be responding to the participation of others etc) and back.

Now that we know how and when this concept of "unplanned change" occurs, we need to take a look at the implications and use of this type of change, but first let me lay out a table that differentiates planned vs. unplanned change and what can happen when used in conjunction with each other:

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3" align="center">Person / Group you are working with</td></tr>
<tr><td>Outcomes</td><td>Planned</td><td>Unplanned</td></tr>
<tr><td>Planned</td><td>Known outcome:
-Action Planning
-Training
-Behavioral Contracting</td><td>Unknown outcomes of other:
- *Insight*
- Creativity</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unplanned</td><td>Unknown outcomes for you:
- *Insight*
- Creativity</td><td>Uncharted territory – like the secret box in the Johari Window</td></tr>
</table>

(Left margin label spanning the Planned/Unplanned rows: **You**)

Most of us operate under the assumption that planned change is our only option because it is the culturally accepted and controllable view of change. Introducing the idea of "unplanned change" as an option holds interesting possibilities, especially considering the beneficial outcomes that can be derived from it. Next, let's take a look at some characteristics of change:

1. What are the conditions under which change occurs?
    a. Know that change can occur
    b. There is a feeling of dissatisfaction or pain
    c. The needed change comes from *insight* (or intervention)

2. How do we arrive at the perceived desired change in any circumstance
    a. Determine what the cause of dissatisfaction is
    b. Determine what I/we can do to change it (usually tell others)
    c. There needs to be energy to start a change (force)
    d. We can use others to define our options
    e. Take steps, one at a time, if successful take bigger steps – higher risk
    f. Get support from others – establish universality
    g. Reward must come to sustain change
    h. Live and accept the outcomes

This is the crux if it; if the other person is using *unplanned change*, and you aren't, you are at a disadvantage. If both are using *unplanned change*, contingencies and possibilities are available, but when only you are using *unplanned change*, great possibilities to affect your desired outcomes are available. If you are willing to take control of the situation, for you to be powerful, you need to take charge of the *unplanned change* process.

How do you prepare for the intersection of this *unplanned change* in you daily work, during strategic encounters and in training? You know your business and the landscape there, you can look for opportunities to use it and manage *unplanned change* in a variety of circumstances. It is important that you be able identify the appropriate times to use it. It can also be useful to identify when others are using it both knowingly and un-knowingly (at least in the larger context of this subject).

Now let's look at what can occur when this type of "unplanned change" is used, and in our model this "unplanned change" is derived from the shift in both your and their (the other person you are interacting with) awareness from internally focused to externally focused and back:

1. We could be in a group setting, training session or a diad and create a shift > Contact → Center → Contact by asking someone to reflect on an idea or circumstance relevant to the setting or topic at hand
2. We must be aware of the need to do so, it's strategic use, and the possibilities the change will bring (I will also be introducing the power continuum of interventions that must be considered)
3. When we do this, we create changes in others minds (at our will) which shift their thoughts and create undetermined change or "unplanned change"
4. The nature of this change is that it is most often positive and creative in nature and which produces awareness. In any event there will be a slight if not significant shift in that persons mind, that we initiated, based on a perceived need to affect a change – the result of which is an unknown outcome
5. Further, you need to be ready when the shift in awareness comes and when you see the outcome, you need to take the opportunity to use it to achieve you desired outcome
6. By initiating this type of change, you should also be aware of your own shifts and the "unplanned change" that occurs within your own thoughts. This will necessarily occur as you shift from participation to observation and back to participation, weather in contact or center mode.
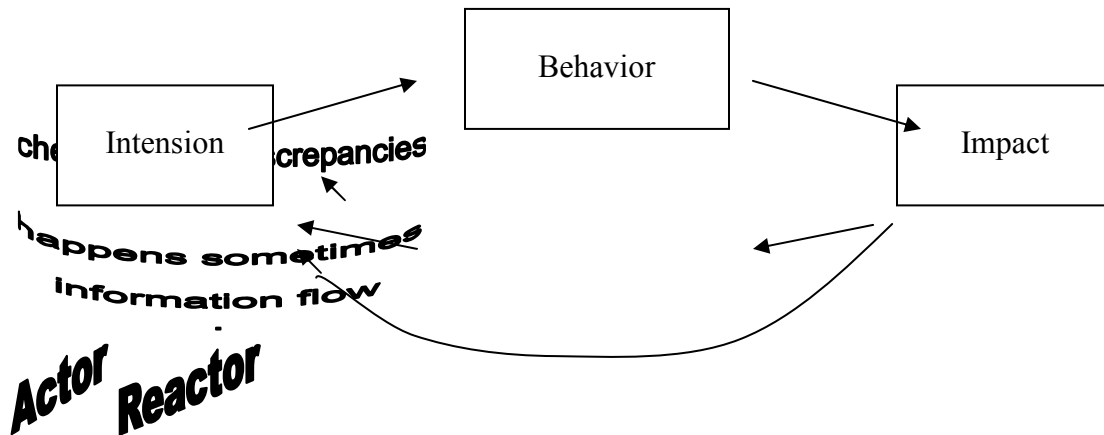
Control differences between Planned and Unplanned Change

In planned change, when helping someone by giving them advice and maintaining control, the helper is getting the most out of it	In unplanned change, the change lacks control and facilitates the person [centering] being helped, they get more out of it and the helper is more passive

Let's take a look at a familiar process (giving and receiving feedback) that we are all familiar with to illustrate unplanned change in action. I will go on to explain an expanded aspect of feedback that will be useful to understand the greater implications for the use of "unplanned change" as a productive change process.

Feedback as an Intervention

Refer to the model below, a diagram of feedback - to illustrate **Actor** and **Reactor** as well as other dimensional aspect of feedback.

Behavior

Intension

Impact

Ch... screpancies

happens sometimes

information flow

Actor Reactor

Understanding that engaging in feedback as a process is an example of unplanned change in action let's take a look at what happens and how unplanned change occurs in this interaction as well as how you can manage unplanned change effectively to produce your desired outcomes.

> Feedback is the mother of *intervention* – and the shifts I've described are central to them. To review; the awareness that occur from the shift of being externally focused to internally focused and back (Contact → Center → Contact) and when a person moves their orientation from observing to that of participating and back (Observer → Participant → Observer).

>> **NOTE**: there must be **contact > center shifts** or **observer > participant shifts** for there to be an *intervention*.

What established your/their behavior? → impact and intention

Now let's look at a Competency Model for leadership using **Center / Contact flexibility and Participant / Observer flexibility** skills in the context of feedback as the intervention.
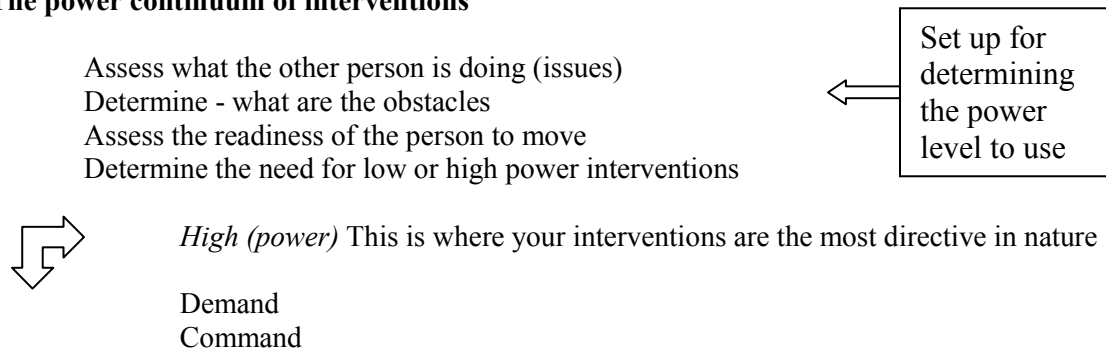
Contact OBSERVATION	Center FEELING
1) Notice behavior, something significant	1) Notice something significant, a sensation in me is occurring
2) Identify and specify that behavior	2) Label and identify the feeling or sensation (pay attention)
3) Risk sharing the observation	3) Risk sharing the feeling
4) Communicate to the Actor in a way that is understood	4) Share in a way that the other can understand them

Being able to differentiate between **contact / observations** and **centering / feelings** is an important distinction in using "unplanned change". But because it's a bit complicated to explain within the limitations of a short article, let's suffice it to say that being aware of the dynamics of the exchange of information and the interaction between parties causes both a shift in awareness and orientation to the extent that unplanned change occurs, you need to watch and observe and take the opportunity to manage the change as awareness and changes occur both within you as well as the other person(s) you are working with.

I indicated that I would provide some insight into how you can manage this unplanned change effectively to produce your desired outcomes. The key is to understand what is taking place in an interaction and realize that unplanned change is occurring, to watch for it and act on it as it presents itself. There is no way to provide advice or methods to produce any particular outcome; the issue is to be able to initiate it, see it occur and use it to move things toward your desired outcomes. To the end of developing competency in managing outcomes I suggest that you develop an Outlook to experiment with unplanned change in low risk situations that will expand your understand and use of it in action. All of this will also improve your ability to see others that may be managing unplanned change and the empowering affect of observing it, and co-managing it rather than being managed by others.

Now let's move on to the power continuum of interventions and build on the knowledge of how to use this "unplanned change" in productive ways. Knowing that there are various levels of power involved with particular interventions is important in that using the improper amount of power can be detrimental to the achieving desired outcomes. Determining the amount of power to intervene with provides you with the final building block in our understanding of how to use your interpersonal skills and "unplanned change" to affect the desired change you want to achieve.

The power continuum of interventions

Assess what the other person is doing (issues)
Determine - what are the obstacles
Assess the readiness of the person to move
Determine the need for low or high power interventions

> Set up for determining the power level to use

High (power) This is where your interventions are the most directive in nature

Demand
Command

Paradoxical (ask the person to do their resisting behavior)
Garden Path question (leading question)
Confronting
Feedback
Self Disclosure
Giving and observation (asking)
Modeling (how to participate without being dominant)

Low (power) This is a more indirect way of intervening but does mean it is less effective – in fact the right power level is the most effective.

Notice how the lower power/demand interventions are more attuned to unplanned change where as the higher power/demand interventions are directive in nature and in the planned change arena. So what is important to take in to account is that the more subtle interventions requiring finesse are what drive a more self directed developmental process. This is the nature of what is needed to develop interdependent and highly productive relationships.

Conclusions

So what can you do with all the information that I've shared to this point? Unplanned change and aspects of human interaction that I have touched on can be used everyday and begins with noticing what is happening when you interact with others starting with your Outlook. You can be more decisive in how you approach key interaction and relationship with the knowledge of what happens when you enter a situation with another or a group (Inclusion) as well as when you exchange information (Disclosure and Feedback). You now know that you can create "unplanned change" in others when they are stuck, knowing that the outcomes are most likely to be positive.

Suggestions for the application of the aspects of communication, human interaction and unplanned change covered in this article:

- Outlook – I believe that everyone can benefit from the development of a mission statement for themselves and Outlook is a good starting point. Directing our thought into actionable steps that will support our self development can only improve our lives and when it is directed at understanding our relationships with others, it helps improve them as well. I provided an examples of how I directed my Outlook as I approached group leadership training which I hope you find helpful in developing your own

- Inclusion – Knowing there is the dynamic of inclusion every time you meet with others, but most importantly in key interviews, meetings and group settings this knowledge can help you manage your entry as well as work to assist others who struggle with these moments and interactions by building in introductions and interactions that help all those involved in getting together in productive ways, right from the start

- Disclosure – a little bit more involved, but simply put disclosure is the sharing something of ourselves e.g. a feeling or something about ourselves. Knowing that disclosures can help you grow and enrich the relationships that you have, you should think about making disclosures strategic based on what is going on in the situation you find yourself in, and especially to move things toward productive outcomes

- Feedback – As stated previously, feedback is the mother of interventions. The terminology infers meddling in the affairs of another, but in practicality it is the proper management of your affairs in a dynamic environment, that of dealing with others. This needs to be understood in order for this to be an effective tool for you in your communications and interactions with others. Hopefully I've provided some new information about feedback that will be useful to you when giving and receiving feedback. To make progress in the utilization of, the nuances of and effective use of feedback - my suggestion is that some effort be made on your part to direct your Outlook in to use of feedback to improve your communications with others and ultimately achieving optimal outcomes

- "unplanned change" – A natural outcome of human interaction that occurs during awareness and orientation shift we have learned about – that which, as we become aware of as a communication tool and how to derive benefits from then in the work we do with people, and we are able to use effectively in producing superior interpersonal outcomes

    "The nature of this change is that it is most often positive and creative in nature and which produces awareness. In any event there will be a slight if not significant shift in a person's thoughts that we initiated based on a perceived need to affect a change, the results of which are unknown outcomes".

    In this limited discussion I hope that I have provided you with enough background to either begin using it at some useful level or become intrigued enough to pursue its further understand and utilization.

Implications: The aspects of communication and the concepts of "unplanned change" discussed in this article can be used in a variety of activities of safety professionals to achieve optimal safety results. These include: One on one communications with workers, supervisors, managers and executives; working on task forces or group projects; in safety training sessions and; in developing programs and rolling them out. In the types of situations anticipated in organizational development (OD), these activities are traditionally used in: entry and contracting with businesses; process consultation; group facilitation requiring consensus building; conflict management sessions; conducting climate surveys; developing change strategies with management; preparing workers for democratic decision making and; working on pier performance measurement programs to name a few. All of the later OD related situations also have implications for the safety professional who is working at levels to integrate safety into an organizations fabric. I wish you well in your work and hope that I've provided some new perspectives, or touched on old ones that you might have forgotten, that will help you achieve your desired optimal safety results because the work we do makes a difference in people's lives.

Exhibit A

Johari Window	Known to Self	Not known to self
Known to others	**Public**	**Blind**
Not known to others	**Private** or **hidden**	**Secret** or **unknown**

Exhibit B

Modes of Participation	→ Modality Shift ←		Always a combination of two - four combinations
	Ω Center (going inside)	**Ω Contact** (me to them)	
	Ω Participation	*Ω Observation*	