More tips on successful change

Another very effective method

of keeping the organisation dynamic

was to conduct small scale,

time-limited experiments

that brought people together

to solve problems.

The advantage of doing this

is that if you make a small change

and you try it out,

it is not a disaster if it goes wrong.

And you can withdraw from it

and try something else.

The next thing I want to draw

your attention to from the RSC

was something very unusual.

And this was the language

that people used

to talk about what was going on

in the organisation.

There was an open recognition

of the RSC's emotional life.

We all know that working

in a dysfunctional organisation

breeds fear, anger, resentment,

and all sorts of horrible feelings.

By contrast, work life can be joyful,

sociable, and satisfying.

But organisations and leaders

almost never talk about these things.

At the RSC it was different.

Indeed the artistic director

Michael Boyd, in a speech

at the New York Public Library,

he used the word "love" ten times.

Love! When describing what the RSC'S

organisational-sustaining change

was all about.

I mean, I know he is a theatre director

but even so, it is quite remarkable.

Finally in this list of things

that the RSC did is something

that resonates strongly I think

with the findings of the recent

Our Museum's project research.

And that is self-reflection.

This is a critical element

in change processes.

Self-reflection was not an add-on

that people had to find extra time for.

It was embodied in some of the processes

I have just talked about;

the small scale experimentation

that questioned how things were done,

that's reflecting on how we do things,

the show and tell sessions where people

had to think about their own work

in order to explain it to others.

One other way that the RSC

built reflection into the process

was the research that we carried out

as Demos researchers.

By interviewing people about the changes

that were happening, we made them

reflect on and talk

about what they were doing.

They had to articulate the change to us.

So it was useful then to have to tell

outsiders what was happening

on a regular basis.

Now, you might have noticed one thing

missing from this list of things so far.

And that is a grand plan.

The RSC didn't have one.

They knew what they wanted to do

to be the best theatre for Shakespeare,

to improve morale and finances,

to give audiences amazing experiences.

They talked about those

and they were in the mission.

They also knew what improved finances

and better audience experiences

would look and feel like.

But they resisted spending time

on writing a master plan

with a step-by-step route

to achieving those things.

And there are good reasons for that.

One is that something always goes wrong

with master plans. Life intervenes.

And as soon as a target is missed

or a schedule slips, the cynics rush in

and say, "Oh look,

it hasn't worked, what a surprise!"

The reality is that many things

may be going well and it doesn't matter

if the schedule slips a bit.

But having hitched credibility

to a master plan, any deviation

can be seen as a failure.

Which brings me

to the issue of measurement.

The RSC was very resistant to measurement,

believing it to be "too corporate"

and "not what the theatre was about,"

"too inflexible" and likely to lead

to the sort of cynicism

that I have just described.

However in reality they did in fact

measure lots of things;

from financial performance, to staff morale,

to critical responses to their work.

It is my belief that measuring things

is useful, but they have to be

the right things to work

for the specific organisation.

Most museums and cultural organisations,

I think, use information pretty poorly.

The staff often collects facts and figures

for funders and trustees

rather than for themselves

so that information becomes burdensome

and not relevant to the every day.

But with the right information

you can see where you are

and where you are going.

Data is in fact essential,

and too few cultural organisations

make good use of it.

Even fewer are driven by it.

Measurement doesn't need to be

a chore, it just needs to meet your needs.

When I worked at Demos we constructed

a simple dashboard to tell us

how we were doing.

It was the bank balance, the order book,

a simple staff survey about how

positive or negative people were feeling,

our level of media coverage

and a few other things.

And it really did help us

to embrace change

and to anticipate how we needed to change.

So, I have given you a list of things

that the RSC did in order to help

the organisation change.

But these mechanical things;

the processes and structures

like meetings and budgets,

they don't tell the whole story.

The alterations in processes

and structures made the organisation

more effective and efficient.

But they were not only ends in themselves.

Rather, they changed the way

that people behaved and interacted

and the way that they thought

about their roles and responsibilities.

They increased

the organisation's abilities

to learn, to adapt when things

in the outside world changed,

and to be honest about itself.

And that, in turn, allowed them to change

on a continuous basis.

You said many interesting things

and I picked up very much

on the emotional side that you highlighted

in processes of change

and networks of relationships.

When we change, we have to make choices

and we have to give some things up.

How can organisations support

and cope with the grief and the loss

of losing the things that you have to lose

as well as celebrate the love and the joy

and the other emotions

that you mentioned?

It's about loss as well as about gain.

Yeah.

Well, I think one of the big answer to that is

that they are simply

not acknowledged very often.

And it is important to bring these things

out into the open and to talk about them

in those terms of grief and loss

and "we won't be able to do this"

and "it makes us sad"

and all that kind of thing.

You can even use kinds of rituals,

why not, you know, this thing is coming to an end

but something else will be born out of it.

And for most organisations it is simply

an issue of articulating things

and just getting them on the surface

and making sure

that everybody understands that.

And I think there is a particular case

there very often between

sort of new staff and old staff,

people who have

a long history in places,

who have seen things grow,

who might be more attached to them

than people who have been there

for a briefer space of time.

I think organisations are very bad

at acknowledging

it is not that we are putting in the bin

things that we don't want any more,

it's just that we have to make choices

and we all have to go down the direction.

And there might be a conversation

to be had there about,

is the value stable?

It is not the value that is dying,

it is a particular way of carrying it out.

The value actually lives on

in another form.

If the value is being changed

that is a different kind of conversation.

So, again, it goes to articulating

these things, discussing them,

bringing them out in the open

which organisations often fail to do.