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Bernard: Hello everyone, and welcome to the second series of Words and Actions, a podcast on how language matters in business, politics and beyond.

We want to focus on language not just as a vessel of communication but on a very important aspect of communication in which we can actually change the way people think, and even perhaps the way reality is perceived. And I'm not doing this on my own, of course. It's high time I introduced my co-hosts, Erika Darics and Veronika Koller. Hello there!

Veronika: Hello. And we're obviously doing this together with Bernard De Clerck.

Erika: Yes. Hi, Bernard. Hi, Veronika. Hello everyone.

Bernard: Hi.

Veronika: Hello.

Bernard: Maybe I'm going to refer to the blog that we have. So, we have a website where you can find references [and] where you have a full transcript of the episodes. You have bio blurbs of our guests. So, please visit the website, as well, for the new listeners. [wordsandactions.blog]

Veronika: And we promise to keep up the good work in series 2, now. One request we had a couple of times over the first series was that people enjoyed the interviews a lot but asked could we perhaps invite people from a variety of disciplines? And also beyond academia. Of course, we're happy to oblige and we'll start that today.

A bit later on, we'll chat to practitioner Dr Katie Best. Then we'll have a more extended interview as well, with academic and consultant Dr Paul Lawrence.

Erika: We're going to talk to our guests about a very interesting topic, and that's how language matters in change management. Now, I know this

might sound like an unusual combination and some listeners may wonder, "Okay, what does language have to do with change management?"

Bernard: Well, Erika, can I just refer to episode 1 and episode 2 of the first series where it's made very obvious what the impact of language can be?

Veronika: Yes, we don't need to explain it to our listeners. Although, you know, it is perhaps sometimes worth repeating the point.

Bernard: Uh huh.

Erika: Yeah. I guess the idea that language, and specifically how we talk about things, creates different views of reality is very, very important in a situation where we envisage a situation that doesn't yet exist. This is why language and communication is so important in change management.

Then, of course, this happens at individual and team levels. People collectively try to make sense of a situation. Leaders try to imbue them with their view of the situation and discuss possible futures, possible courses of action.

Bernard: Yeah. Managing change is essentially changing mindsets, isn't it? In your book [Darics & Koller, Language in Business, Language at Work, Palgrave Higher Education 2018], there's a nice quote by Woodrow Wilson. He says, "If you want to make enemies, try to change something." (Laughter)

So, in order to change that mindset, it's not only important, we think, what the change is but, of course, also why the change is necessary. In some cases, this is pretty obvious because the need for the change is obvious. Take a pandemic, for instance.

Veronika: Oh yeah. Just a random example. Yeah. (Laughter)

Erika: Not at all relevant!

Bernard: So, we had to change our behaviour. But of course, the reason was pretty obvious as well. This is a kind of reactive change. This is what we would call a revolutionary change.

Veronika: Yeah. It's in reaction to something but it's also revolutionary because it changed everything, didn't it, really?

Bernard: Yeah.

Veronika: The way we live. No less than that.

Bernard: Yeah. But the reason is, "If we want to stay healthy, this is what we have to do." Now, in other cases, the initiatives are motivated by less obvious reasons. Especially when the change is proactive and when it takes a long time, for instance. This is what we can call evolutionary change. In these cases, you may not feel the merits as an individual, but future generations might.

If I can hark back to the pandemic once again... Biologists, for instance, say that in order to avoid another pandemic we have to change the economic model that we're using. We have to focus on de-growth and not on consumption. Not on further exploitation. Not on more, more, more.

But of course, that has repercussions on an individual level because we have to consume less and perhaps travel less. You can feel that, in these cases, you have this kind of resistance.

Erika: Yes. I guess the problem, as always in these cases, is that what motivates change is an abstract thing. It's very hard to imagine. It's very hard to describe. It's intangible.

This is why often when leaders come into an organisation and say, "Oh, hey ho. Let's do a rearranging of departments and restructuring," people really struggle. Because they don't see... They can't connect their everyday realities with these broader, more abstract aspirations of either the leader or what the situation requires.

Veronika: So, it's very important how people talk about change. The change makers, how do they talk about change?

But perhaps also a word of caution here. Change for the sake of change is pointless. Sometimes we are in organisations where the only reason for change seems to be to improve someone's CV so that they can then move on and say, "Oh look, I restructured this and that." That can actually be very destructive.

Maybe you've come across the metaphor of the albatross, this big bird who swoops in, leaves its droppings everywhere and then departs again.

Erika: No, but I really like it! (Laughter) Make sure you share it on the blog.

Veronika: Ah, I guess maybe we all have met an albatross in our working lives, you know?

Erika: Yes. I guess these senseless... these change initiatives where the meaning is not clear, this is what leads to this popular or famous number. I'm not sure if it's true but, in popular literature or on scientific estimates, you always see this number, "70%". Do you know what that is?

Bernard: Hmm.

Veronika: Changes that don't come off, fail or don't work?

Erika: Exactly. Exactly.

Veronika: This may be an urban myth but it has this grain of truth in it. With many change initiatives, you end up where you were before. Or within a year, you end up where you were before. In the meantime, you have shredded a lot of nerves and spent a lot of money. (Laughter)

But of course, there are cases where change needs to happen, right? We mentioned the pandemic. What would be other examples?

Bernard: Well, advances in technology, for instance. That would be one obvious reason. Automation. I'm also thinking of—and it's again related to health—the diversifications I have seen on restaurant menus. Now you've got lots of allergies. People switching dietary requirements, going vegetarian or vegan. Of course, restaurants have to adapt to that. That is also an ongoing change, but one that is very present, I would say.

Erika: Closer to home, change in demographic. Any dip in the birth rate in a certain year will affect universities hugely. Or interest in various subjects affects us, departments.

Veronika: Yeah, that's right. There are a lot of situations where change really does need to happen. Ideally, proactively in an evolutionary way.

Another area where change needs to happen could for instance be when an organisation's internal culture shows outside of the organisation and works against the aims of the organisation. When internal culture leaks out to customers and clients. We have a person who knows quite a bit about that.

Bernard: Oh, yes. We'll introduce Dr Katie Best in a second. She has some very nice examples on culture leaks.

Erika: We are very glad to have Dr Katie Best with us on the podcast today. She's a leadership coach and trainer based in London. She's the founder and director of the agency called Taylorbest but she is also a visiting researcher at King's College London Business School and head tutor on the LSE's MBA essentials programmes. She has extensive experience in leadership coaching. But today, she will talk to us about culture leaks. Hi, Katie.

Katie: Hi, how are you?

Bernard: Hi, Katie. Good morning. So, Katie, we exchanged a couple of emails. In one of those emails, you told us that you are obsessed with culture

leaks. First of all, what is the obsession all about? Secondly, can you explain the concept of culture leaks to our listeners?

Katie: Absolutely. My obsession with culture leaks started when I was walking down the Strand and saw, in the window of a very well-known bookshop chain... I might as well say it, it was Waterstones quite a few years ago. There was a sign printed, not in Waterstones font, on an A4 sheet of paper, saying, "Please, please shut the door behind you."

I remember seeing this sign and just thinking, "Wow." We've got this formal culture of Waterstones. It's very nice, very friendly. And someone has obviously just been so fed up with the fact that the door keeps getting left open, they have got an A4 sheet of paper, printed out a sign on the computer and stuck it in the window of the shop.

I started thinking, at that point, about how we have this very formal culture of Waterstones and how we perceive a bookshop to be. Friendly, nice, a particular font. Versus what actually happens and how people actually feel in the company. So, the real culture versus the culture the company would like us to have. That kind of idea of culture leak came from there.

Bernard: Okay. So, you're kind of wondering, "Was this an impulsive act by an individual or do we indeed have a kind of leak here from internal communication". Ah, right. Okay.

Katie: Yeah.

Bernard: Any other examples that you can think of? Favourite ones?

Katie: Oh, there are so many. Once you start looking for A4 signs, they are everywhere. I think A4 signs are such a good example because it's something that's so easy to just generate. You get a piece of paper and either scribble on it by hand or print it out very quickly on the computer. It's a way of communicating to the world what you really care about.

There was another really nice one a couple of months ago in local council offices near where I live in London. It was a sign that said, "For

weekend deliveries, please call the security team on..." And then it had a mobile phone number.

But rather than this sign being in the front of the building just once, it was printed out around 10 times across this window front. (Laughter) Obviously because the people doing the deliveries kept missing the signs. (Laughter) So, as the anger grew the number of signs obviously increased, to the point where it was all you could notice in their window.

Bernard: Yeah. So, this concept of repetition that we will talk about in this episode was clearly present there, in terms of change management. (Laughter)

Katie: Yeah.

Erika: Yeah. I like how you referred to these signs as little windows into how people really think within a company. Can you maybe give us an example where there was a very clear clash between what the company said it does, or about its culture, and how the sign communicated with the outside world?

Katie: I think, if we go back to the council offices sign, this is supposed to be a really warm, welcoming building. It's a public building that gets opened to people during the week for enquiries. But they've plastered the front of it with these signs that are quite aggressive and quite against that idea that everyone is welcome, and that it's obvious what you should do and this is a nice clear, clean space in which you go and engage with the council. [That changed] to it being all about weekend deliveries.

I think there's quite a significant clash there between this open, warm, welcoming space versus, "Please, please deliver these parcels at the weekend!"

Erika: Right. So, you see these signs both as a reflection of the culture, or how people think within an organisation, but also as a means of changing or influencing behaviour?

Katie: Yeah, absolutely. Often, they're a way of disciplining customers. When you see those signs in a public space, it's saying, "Our company or shop culture is one thing. But then we need you to interact with us in this way in order for us to be able to cope."

So, we're seeing lots of A4 signs around at the moment, with the way that we're having to increase social distancing in public spaces, saying, "Don't sit at this table. This chair can't be used. Make sure you keep a gap between yourselves." It's kind of indoctrinating people who aren't familiar with the company or organisation culture as to how they should behave when they're in the company space.

Bernard: Right. Do you think it's a good idea to use many directives? Because that's what I notice. "Please, please close the door." You could also do it in a different way, for instance by saying, "Thank you for closing the door." But I have the impression that the urgency of the frustration of the situation leads to the use of these very directive speech acts, I would say. Is that a good idea?

Katie: Probably not, is it? It doesn't feel like a good idea. It doesn't feel like, if you've got a very strong brand for your organisation, that you would then phrase it in a way that might be against that.

You see some amazing A4 signs around as well, where people have really constructed something that's in keeping with their brand. There's the really famous signs on Virgin trains about what you should and shouldn't flush down the toilet. "Don't flush your boyfriend's jumper. Don't flush your hopes and dreams."

I've seen that replicated in quite a few café toilets in their own font, which is then in keeping with brand. It's a much nicer way of saying, "Could you make sure you're careful with what you throw down our loos?"

Erika: Katie, thank you very much for being here and for your interesting examples. We will make sure to include several of those in our blog post. Thank you.

Bernard: Thank you very much, Katie. Bye.

Katie: Thanks a lot. Bye.

Bernard: That was a very nice interview we had with Katie. I also appreciate her reference to the Covid examples and the different types of approaches that you can have.

You have the old-school imperatives, "Wear a mask and save lives", for instance. You also have this reference to social behaviour, right? People are expected to conform to a kind of norm.

But what I also notice—and this is also referring back to one of the episodes we had on talking to customers in the first series [episode 4]—is the use of creativity and even humour. People start playing with these messages and these instructions to make sure that the impact is still there.

In Amsterdam, for instance, you can see signs like, "Clever chillin' is Corona killin'." With the adapted spelling. That, of course, refers to the target group of the young people because the second wave started with them. You see that creativity is still very important here, as well.

Veronika: Yeah. There's a lot in the UK. A little bit flippant but young people are reminded, "Don't kill grandma."

Erika: Aw.

Veronika: You know, because... (Laughter) It's a bit... Yeah. But there's a point to this because, if we see rising infections in younger people at one point, it's likely to be passed on to older generations.

Erika: Yeah. I really like to look at these signs and I think it's a goldmine for all of us linguists and people who are interested in semiotics, for example. Because, yes, they do reveal how various organisations try to address their audiences. But they also do provide a little insight into the organisation.

We went on a hike last weekend and I saw this interesting sign in a quaint village pub window. It was clearly a little homey place. The sign said, "The decision has been made to keep the pub closed." I thought, "Why would a friendly neighbourhood couple who run the pub say, 'the decision has been made'?" It was clearly so much in that message, in that passive voice, trying to distance themselves from that decision that they had to take.

Veronika: Yeah. We have a couple of examples on the blog that go with this episode. Be it to nudge people to adopt particular behaviours around public health or any other change, really, the main challenge is always to get from what's known as pushback or resistance to what's known as buy-in or acceptance. Because people tend to first be at least wary about change.

But how do you get from this resistance or wariness to acceptance and even support for the change initiative? That needs a lot of sense-giving.

Erika: Sense-giving is a wonderful term. This is where it boils down to the right choice of words. The right type of language.

I have a very good example. I hope you don't mind me sharing my passion about the Apollo space programme because this example comes from there. It's from a flight director called Gene Kranz. When he went in to work in NASA after the Apollo 1 tragedy, where there was a fire... I don't know if you know the history but the fire killed three astronauts in the NASA space programme. He came into NASA and gave a speech which came to be known as "The Kranz dictum".

I like it because it's such a wonderful example of sense giving. Now, I will read a short part from this for you, just to get a sense of it. But I cannot compete with proper re-enactments and I would like to point our listeners to a wonderful podcast called, '13 Minutes to the Moon', episode 4. That's where they can find this Kranz dictum.

So, he went in. Imagine the tragedy. Three astronauts died and that team was responsible. He said, "From this day forward, flight control

will be known by two words: tough and competent. 'Tough' means we are forever accountable for what we do and what we fail to do. We will never again compromise our responsibilities. Every time we walk into mission control, we will know what we stand for.

"'Competent' means we will never take anything for granted. We will never be found short in our knowledge and in our skills. Mission control will be perfect. When you leave this meeting today, you will go to your office and the first thing you will do there is to write, 'Tough and competent' on your black boards. It will never be erased."

Right? I mean, that's top-level sense giving!

Veronika: Well, lots of short, punchy sentences, that's for sure. Lots of repetition, there. It seems very clear to me. So, what do we make of how he phrased that? What do we make of the short sentences, in particular?

Bernard: I think they work well. They're short, snappy, you get the message across. Clear language is very important, too.

But I would also like to introduce a kind of myth-buster at this particular occasion, if you don't mind. Because what you can see when people talk about change management is that you have to use clear language, avoid long sentences etc.

You actually have numbers that you can find online. 12-14 words is okay. But for academics, thank God, we can go up to 20-23 words. (Laughter) Look at that! Isn't that amazing? But we have to be very careful with this in terms of the context that these particular figures and numbers work in.

I did an experiment based on sustainability reports. The problem with those reports is that they're always too long. The sentences are too long. It's too difficult to understand. So, we said, "Okay, we'll make the sentences shorter." We did an experiment. What happened is that people still found the short sentences to be equally unintelligible.

Why is that, you may wonder? Well, we thought or we came to the conclusion that flow is very important, as well. And rhythm. If you use these short sentences you get this kind of telegram style. It worked in the context that Erika was illustrating but, in the case of sustainability reports, it backfires because you lose the flow. You lose the rhythm. You also lose internal cohesion.

That's something I wanted to point out, as well. So, careful with this kind of fixation on length in terms of sentences.

Veronika: Good point, Bernard. Thank you. One thing we can see about the Kranz dictum or speech that he gave there is that we have a lot of repetition. He keeps hammering home this "Tough. Competent."

Also, repetition is important for communicating change initiatives but also redundancy. Not just saying several things over and over again but also saying them in different ways and through different communication channels. Don't just write a memo or give a speech, also post a video message to all staff. Visit them in person etc. So, redundancy there.

Erika: The story has it that the colleagues of Gene Kranz had the two words printed on T-shirts and they were wearing it happily when they went to work.

Veronika: That's certainly another communication channel, yeah! Definitely. All this falls under the headline of plain language. There's a lot of work on that.

One thing I would just point out anecdotally is that, in business language, you often have words—not sentences but words—that are unnecessarily long. So, people keep adding bits to words.

They don't talk about functions anymore but about, "Functionalities". Or they compound words. They don't say, "That candidate has that right skills", they now have, "The right skill set." I even had someone once say to me, "Oh, this candidate certainly has the right skill set base." (Laughter) You wonder where is this going to end? (Laughter)

Bernard: Well, we've been focusing on the message, now, and what the message should be like. What we haven't focused on yet are the addressees. The people that have to adapt to the change. The people that have to buy in. What is important—and this will become very clear, I think, when talking to Paul Lawrence, the interviewee that we'll have—is the aspect of listening.

Erika: Right. We are very happy to welcome Dr Paul Lawrence, who is the co-director of the Centre for Coaching in Organisations, or CCO for short. He also teaches coaching at the Sydney Business School, at the University of Wollongong. But what interests us very much is his work for the coaching centre.

On the CCO website, they generously share journal articles and white papers. A really great resource if you're interested in coaching [or] change management, both in practice and teaching.

Paul is based in Sydney and he has kindly agreed to give up his evening to chat to us. Welcome, Paul.

Paul: Thank you. Lovely to be here.

Bernard: Hi, Paul. We invited you on the podcast because you clearly have a soft spot for language and communication. So, join the club. Welcome!

In fact, when we have a look at your latest co-authored book... and there are many authors. I've actually seen them online in a nice YouTube clip. 'The Tao of Dialogue', that's the title of your book. It's all about that, isn't it? How to transform human relationships, both one-to-one and team relationships, through dialogues.

You specifically refer to the concept of dialogue. Can you tell us a bit more about the basic concept of the book and about Michael, one of the central characters in your book? It's very intriguing.

Paul: Dialogue, for me, sits at the heart of change leadership. At the CCO, we do a lot of work in the change space. Sitting at the heart of change is dialogue. When we talk about dialogue, we're really referring to the way

that word gets used by people like David Bohm and Bill Isaacs. They distinguish it as a particular form of conversation.

Where I come into the conversation really aware of... You know the little voices in the head? I'm aware of my judgement. I'm aware of myself. And I'm able to suspend that in order to really be deeply curious and understand the other person's perspective. So, there's a listening element to dialogue. I voice, I say that thing that needs to be said, respectfully.

Sitting at the heart of change is our capacity to engage in dialogue. As a consultant, I talk a lot to organisations about this. As soon as I use that word 'dialogue', people's eyes sort of glaze over because they're thinking that I'm meaning something different. They're thinking that I'm meaning dialogue in the sense of just conversation. Any kind of conversation equals dialogue. Whereas I'm talking about a very specific form of conversation.

So, the people that I wrote the book with—there were seven of us, I think—were all experiencing the same thing. Talking to clients, eyes glaze over. So, we thought, "We really need to explain what we mean by dialogue."

The seven of us went to a hotel in the UK for two and a half days to engage in a dialogue about dialogue, from which hoped would emerge a book about dialogue. Which it did!

It's a very short book. The format is really nicked off a book called, 'The Tao of Coaching'. It's written around a story. As you said, Michael is the central character of the story. The intention is to really bring to life, in a very accessible and practical way, what we mean by dialogue.

Michael is really a kind of composite figure of a lot of the folks that we bump into who think they know what we mean but don't. Who are much more engaged in monologue. So, Michael is kind of our target audience, in that sense.

Bernard: Right. So, he engages in dialogue? Or does he engage in conversation to start with and does he end up having dialogues with the other people? Because there are more characters in the book, right?

Paul: Yeah. Essentially, he's like most of us. He's like, "Dialogue equals conversation. I don't know what you mean." He's accompanied by other characters who are there to share with him the idea of dialogue and create that space for him to play with dialogue and see what happens. That's essentially the theme of the book.

Bernard: All right. So, the medium is, in a way, the message as well. That's fantastic. That's a great approach.

Veronika: Yeah. I also find that when something is explained through a story with fictional characters, it really sticks in the mind much more. It's something in stories—and we've talked about stories in previous episodes [episode 7]—that makes them so much more relatable and memorable.

You also emphasised this importance of dialogue in your previous book on 'Leading Change', which is single authored. Again, our listeners can find a link to that in the blog post for this episode. But basically, what you do in your books [is] you talk about listening and we feel that you very much warn leaders not to attach their own meanings to the word they hear, right? Is that idea that they shouldn't interpret what they hear through their own agendas?

Paul: Yeah. The, 'Leading Change' book was based on interviews with 50 leaders around the world. Half of them were CEOs. Rather than get into this whole thing about, "Why doesn't change work?"—and there's quite a lot of stuff around that—we just wanted to talk to them about complex changes that had worked. And try and do a little bit of qualitative analysis—and the analysis is actually included in the book—to work out what the common theme was.

The theme that emerged was dialogue. Dialogue is about listening and voicing. You used that piece around agenda-full/agenda-less. Again, it's

not about just going out and having conversations in the organisation, it's about that particular form of conversation which is dialogue.

The way that some of the people I spoke to... In fact, two or three people spontaneously—because they didn't know each other—used that distinction between agenda-less and agenda-full. Because what a lot of leaders do when they go around organisations is they go out there with a purpose, which is typically to sell a message. That's agenda-full.

Not too many leaders go out there just curious to understand what's going on in their organisation without having a specific agenda. That's the agenda-less approach to conversation. Which is kind of what we're talking about when we talk about dialogue.

Veronika: Right. The agenda-full would really be going out into the company broadcasting your message, only you don't do it via a memo or a video message, you do it via face-to-face interaction. But it's still basically broadcasting rather than finding out and coming with genuine curiosity.

Paul: Yeah. A lot of leaders are a little afraid to do that. I've seen a lot of leaders who... You'll kind of invite them to talk to an audience and they'll be a little nervous about that. They'll do their spiel, which is a very one-way conversation. Then they'll say, "Any questions?" There's about a second's pause before the leader kind of mops their brow and disappears. (Laughter)

Because the notion of actually having to engage in a dialogue, sharing what you really think, that's scary. There are lots of reasons for that. One of which is—and it's still there, it's one of the biggest barriers to dialogue in organisations—the mindset, the mantra that says, "Leaders are supposed to know everything."

Veronika: Yeah.

Erika: There is also an interesting level to this advice. In your book you do say that, apart from this agenda that leaders may have and the not-genuine listening, there is also this problem with people assuming that they

assign meaning to the words they hear. And that meaning is what the speaker intended. We don't check that we've understood the meaning behind the words.

So, that's pragmatics. That's exactly what linguists often try to uncover. How words don't mean just the one thing and they can mean different things in different contexts.

Paul:

Well, yes. We distinguish between four types of listening. Because this notion of, "You need to listen harder" doesn't work. I've been with people on training courses and so on and you might imply they're not trying to listen. They'll look at you very offended and say, "I can repeat back every word that person just said. What do you mean I'm not listening."

What we do in... I think it's in, 'Tao of Dialogue'. It's certainly in, 'Coaching in Three Dimensions'. We distinguish between four types of listening.

One type of listening is when I'm just listening to noise. I'm listening to the sound or the absence of sound. As soon as there's an absence of sound then I can say my bit without interrupting somebody.

Then we talk about listening for content, which is what you're talking about, which is listening for the words. "I can play back every single word." But to your point, I haven't checked out whether the meaning I've taken away from the conversation is the meaning that's intended. That's the third type of listening, which is listening for intention.

Then the fourth type of listening, which I think is really valuable in the change scenario, is listening for identity. Where not only have I heard what it is you're trying to say but I really kind of get why you're trying to say it. I'm listening to your values, your beliefs. I'm just listening to why this is so important to you.

Veronika:

Yeah. Of course, in the context of change management that is a million miles away from linear, top-down models of change management,

where you have eight steps or the freeze metaphor, or whatever it may be. That really takes it to a very different level.

And crucially, it's not the omniscient leader who imposes the change on the organisation and broadcasts it around. But if somebody can get to the fourth level of listening, that is a rare skill indeed. Yes.

Erika: I was just going to ask if this is what you mean by "the new paradigm in change management"?

Paul: Did I use that language? If I did, I regret it. I think the old paradigm and the new paradigm... The old paradigm is, in many respects, the current paradigm. Which is that change leadership and management is about communication.

When the word communication is used, it basically means, "I tell you what needs to happen and you do it. That's because I've got all the data, as a senior exec. I've got all this data. We've had a conversation and we've worked out what needs to happen here. We're going to communicate it."

I used to work at BP in the global head office. This is what communications teams did. They did brochures and pamphlets. This word 'communication' is very much a one-way thing. Now, if you look in a dictionary, that's how communication is defined. But if you look in the dictionary, it's also defined as a two-way conversation.

The point about so-called old and new paradigm... Which isn't that new. Pat Shaw was writing stuff around this 25 years ago, right? They say the first thing you need to understand is [that] you, [the] leader, do not get to control change. Sorry, but you don't. But what you can do is influence change. It's meaning making. People make their own meaning and they do it socially with people they trust.

If you want to influence change, you can't get into all of them, but you need to be mindful about, "Which conversations would I like to be a part of?" and get into the conversation in dialogue. That's listening and

expressing your own point of view. You can influence what happens next but you can't control it.

That's sort of, as Veronika said, the very top-down, linear approach which we can call, "old paradigm", but it's pretty much the existing paradigm. And more the kind of philosophies which are based around notions of complex adaptor systems and social networks and what have you. But we're still in the existing paradigm.

I think it's because, in the so-called new paradigm, you do not get to control change. I think that's a deeply threatening, scary thing for people working in organisations.

Veronika: Especially in leadership positions. Leadership positions perhaps attract people who like to have a sense of control. If you realise that you can't control things, you can only influence, that can be a very existential threat. I can appreciate that.

Paul: Exactly. Exactly.

Erika: Yes. I really like that message. We should poster it all over our blog and everywhere, in fact, in business schools, right?

Veronika: It's like this wonderful Buddhist meme that you may or may not have seen. You see somebody in a meditative pose and it says, "Relax, nothing is under control." (Laughter)

Bernard: I know that one.

Veronika: I very much like that. Yeah. Perhaps we have a final question for you. Can you perhaps give us an example from your coaching practice—without naming names, of course—where the key to a successful change was a change in language within an organisation or a person?

Paul: Yeah. For me, when we talk about language in this context, it's about mindset. It's the one that we've just talked about. That shift in mindset.

You can think about this, actually, with respect to coronavirus and what we're going through at the moment. A lot of the world leaders—certainly

not all of them—when Covid started happening, said things like, "We've got 10 cases so we're fine. Worst case scenario, we'll have 20 cases next week. We've just closed the borders so everything's sorted." Now, that's a very linear way of thinking about things. Again, it implies control.

This happened in the UK, I know. Bournemouth beach... I'd never really heard of... I used to live in the UK. I don't remember wanting to go to Bournemouth beach, particularly. But here on Bondi beach, when it happened here on Bondi beach, that all of a sudden, the beaches were crowded, the leadership got very irate.

Now, if you look at this from a different systemic perspective, or a change perspective, it says, "Don't get irate because your anger is coming from this inability to control. Go to the beach! Go to Bournemouth beach and just have a chat to people. Find out why they're there. They won't all be there for the same reason. So, go and talk to folks and really seek to understand what's going on. Because it's only by understanding what's going on that you'll be able to influence what happens next."

Veronika: Absolutely. Yeah. I can relate to that. I remember, at the beginning of the pandemic, I saw somebody on Twitter saying, "God, my elderly father keeps popping to the shops. He doesn't need anything. Why is he doing this to me?" I thought, "He's not doing it to you. He's doing it for himself. He probably has a need to socialise or a need for security. But you need to find out about that if you want to change his behaviour", right?

Paul: To answer your question, it happens quite a lot in coaching that you'll get people who are frustrated that people are not responding to their wishes.

If people can access a different place, which is almost a more holistic place where they can see the social network for what it is, and they can access that vantage point whereby they can start to see how this meaning making process is unfolding, that gives them a whole

different place to go and engage in that conversation without trying to control in service of changing outcomes. It's a big shift. It's a fundamental shift in mindset.

Veronika: Yes. Thank you, Paul. Again, as usual, I feel we could go on but we can't, I'm afraid, within the time constraints of this podcast episode. But we would all like to thank you so much for coming on. It's been really an honour having you. Thank you.

Paul: An honour to be here. Thank you.

Erika: Thank you.

Bernard: Thank you very much.

Veronika: Bye.

Okay. So, those were some really interesting insights, especially into listening. We would like, though, to look at one more language feature before we go today that people use a lot in change management. That is metaphor.

I could probably have a whole podcast just on metaphor but don't worry, I won't! What I will just say is that metaphor has been recognised to have three functions. One is a cognitive function, usually in explaining something. One is an affective function. So, to perhaps stoke emotions. One is a narrative function, to tell a story. All three are really relevant and important when it comes to change management.

One very prominent metaphor that we often find in change management—and to be honest, in any difficult endeavour—is that of a journey. The journey metaphor.

What we have done for today, because we have quite a few languages between the three of us, is we've collected a number of examples of the languages we have. They're all about seafaring. Sea metaphors, in particular. Nautical expressions used as metaphor. Who wants to start and give us one?

- Bernard: Okay, here we go. In Spanish... My Spanish isn't that good but I'll give it a try. 'Cambiar el rumbo'.
- Veronika: Which means, in German, 'Kurs wechseln'. Or, in English, 'To change course'.
- Bernard: Or in Dutch, 'Van koers veranderen.'
- Veronika: And then we also have... Oh God. This is really hard with the code switching, now. Then we also have, in German, 'Wind in den Segeln haben'. So, 'have wind in the sails of something'.
- Bernard: Okay, here I go again. 'tener el viento en popa'.
- Veronika: Right.
- Erika: I keep thinking about Hungarian but... (Laughter)
- Veronika: You should! Give us a Hungarian example, Erika.
- Erika: Well, the ones I found... Because I really wanted to look at speeches and where there is change or political speeches. We do use metaphors where it's about, 'Sailing to new waters' [or] *új vizekre hajózik*. Or when somebody navigates the ship out of the storm: *kivezeti a hajót a viharból*.
- Veronika: Right. We really can't argue with that, Bernard, can we? (Laughter)
- Bernard: No!
- Veronika: The point being that there are a lot of nautical metaphors. Also including in landlocked countries like Hungary, interestingly enough. Not just in Dutch when you have a seafaring history. In German and English... and I'm sure our listeners can come up with examples.
- Erika: It's very often used for emotional, affective purposes. There is a study that looks at Viktor Orbán's speeches and they noticed how he uses metaphors to communicate uncertainty or feeling lost, to sort of imbue scariness to the listeners. It's very often to do with drifting or sinking:

hánykolódik, süllyed, sodródik. It's all about this uncertain situation. And it is related to the nautical metaphorical group.

Bernard: Right. Can I give you an example from a political speech then, Veronika, for you to analyse in terms of these cognitive and narrative aspects? Is that okay?

Veronika: Yeah, sure. Go on.

Bernard: We have Rutte, who is the Dutch prime minister. He had a speech where he wanted to advocate herd immunity. I'm sure that you are familiar with that in the UK.

Veronika: A metaphor in itself, yes. Herd immunity. (Laughter)

Bernard: Absolutely. He used lots of metaphors. Now, the interesting thing is that he did not use war metaphors, which we do find in Merkel's speech and in Macron's speech.

Veronika: Not so much Merkel, actually. But Macron, definitely.

Bernard: Yeah. Macron, definitely. That's true. So, he wanted to sell this idea of herd immunity and this is what he said. "We moeten blijven varen op het kompas van wetenschappelijke kennis en betrouwbare feiten" Now I'll translate this for you. "We have to determine our course..."—in terms of sailing—"...based on the compass of scientific knowledge and reliable facts."

Erika: Ah.

Veronika: Yeah. That taps into the journey scenario. The sea journey scenario with the compass. But it also speaks to rationality. It tells a story of a journey that is safe, in a way, because it is driven by nautical instruments which, here, stand for scientific knowledge. But emotionally, there's also reassurance. So, "We will be guided on this journey by science." Of course, it also harks back to the Netherlands being a nation of sailors, perhaps even to colonial history.

Another example from Covid is interesting. It's to do with sailing in a storm. Bonnie Henry, the health officer for British Columbia in Canada, said, "We need to recognise that we're all in the same storm. The storm is affecting the world. But we're not in the same boats. I'm going to give you everything we know as a health professional so you can keep afloat."

Here, we have this scenario being somewhat extended. The cognitive function here would be to explain inequality. The same storm but some of us are in luxury yachts, some are in dinghies. But at the same time, she reassures on an emotional level. She gives us a little story about the dangers of sailing in a storm, about the different positions, but also that there is help for everybody.

Right, let's perhaps move to another context. Erika is fond of space travel, as we know, so let's have a bit more on space travel! (Laughter)

Erika: I mean, come on, this was one of the most interesting speeches in the history of speeches. This is Kennedy introducing the space programme. Interestingly, he too uses a nautical metaphor. I will give you this example to analyse.

In his famous speech in 1962, when he introduces the space programme, he says, "We set sail on this new sea because there is new knowledge to be gained and new rights to be won." He says, "The US occupies a position of pre-eminence. We can help decide whether this new ocean will be a sea of peace or a new, terrifying theatre of war."

Veronika: Now that's something, isn't it? He's talking about going to the moon. This is the early 1960s and there's optimism about, "We're going to the moon because we choose to."

This is really interesting because, at the time, that's a very new kind of journey. Humans hadn't been to the moon yet. He uses a historical kind of journey like sailing on a sea to explain a very new kind of journey for his listeners to make sense of that.

And probably also, effectively speaking, he wants to instil enthusiasm in the audience. Of course, he here tells a story about the future. He tells a story about the next 10 years. These three functions—cognitive, affective and narrative—are really intertwined. A very interesting example, really.

Bernard: Yes. I've got one for you, Veronika.

Veronika: Go on.

Bernard: This is an interesting case. Again, I'm going back to Spain. This is research done by some of my UGhent colleagues, Patrick Goethals and Jasper Vandenberghe. It's actually a business-related context where Spanish or Iberian companies are entering the British market and you find newspaper headlines referring to Spanish history.

I'll give you a couple of headlines. See what you make of them. "The corporate Armada is on its way to Britain", "Armada of acquisitions heralds new reign of Spain", "The new GBP: a 30-billion Spanish Armada". So, you have lots and lots of headlines like that, covering these companies entering the British market.

Veronika: An interesting one. Again, we have people going back to history. The Spanish Armada in 1588. That's one metaphor we find a lot when it's about... This is about corporate acquisitions and takeovers. Cross-border takeovers. They are often framed in terms of aggressions.

What's interesting here is that this combines seafaring metaphors, for sure, but also with war metaphors. It extends the scenario to sailing with aggressive purpose. It constructs these cross-border corporate acquisitions as acts of aggression that need to be resisted.

There's also an element of sensationalising it. Otherwise, business news can be a bit on the dry side, if we're honest. This sensationalises it and raises emotions. Perhaps it's even meant to create patriotic resentment.

It harks back to a very, very old conflict between England and Spain. In actual fact, the Netherlands and Flanders also played a role in that so it's not just Britain against Spain. But it's simplified to that, right?

But they change the historical timeline here, as well. The historical story. The Armada, as we know, was destroyed back in 1588. But when you then look at articles that use these headlines you can see that this time the Spanish are actually successful. So, it changes the historical story to meet the narrative function of the metaphor. Interesting example, thank you.

Bernard: You're welcome.

Erika: If our listeners have some really good examples of metaphors, we encourage them to share them with us on our blog, over Twitter or on Facebook. We are present everywhere. (Laughter)

Veronika: Please do. I am always keen on hoarding metaphors. But I think, for now, it's time to perhaps wrap up. Let's see if we have some take-home messages. What have we learned today? What's the one thing that you take from this episode?

Bernard: In my case that would be that change management and management is about listening, not just talking.

Veronika: Okay. Erika?

Erika: Yes. And when you talk, don't be obsessed with your sentence length. That's what I learned.

Veronika: Right. And I knew this but I've once more seen the power of metaphor to shape our realities. That's it for today, dear listeners. We'll be back in a month's time when we start a mini-series on language and entrepreneurship. Take care until then. Bye.

Bernard: Bye.

Erika: Bye.

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