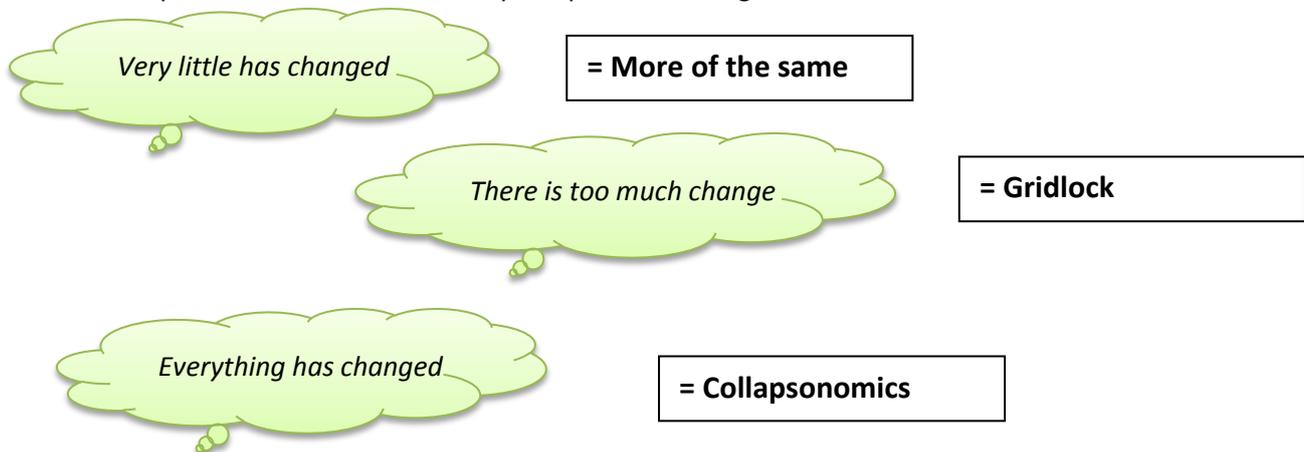


Change



In your experience is change perceived as just more of the same, 'change gridlock' or, 'collapsonomics'(defined below)?

For this piece I can characterise the perceptions of change in the sector as:



Here are some things that have not changed and some that should:

1. What's not changed

These are 'more of the same' type of things. They are the predictable, annoying things which always get attention, or the same old problems which don't get any attention:

- **Performance in the sector:** i.e. there are many good providers, too many satisfactory, with capacity to improve no better than satisfactory (OFSTED Annual Report 09-10)

- **Our sector's image: 'Second rate'** -however annoying and inaccurate this is it is a common perception(see Front page of *FE Focus*, 24 December 2012)
- **Declining commitment and rising disengagement** - one which *should* annoy us but gets scant attention - an enduring problem for *all* organisations with obvious sector effects:. Evidence suggests only 21% of staff are highly engaged. Many businesses now talk of 'engagement recession': [Engagement recession survey, HayGroup](#). Some data suggests this is a global phenomenon fuelled by the economic recession: [AON survey](#)
- **Job-fear:** this is increasing because of the economic climate. But how much 'fear' was already present? Is its increase now a matter of *degree*? Is it built on the climate which creates disengagement in the first place - that is, something which hasn't, but needs to change?

2. What has not changed but should

The 'change gridlock' perception suggests that 'there is too much change'. There are obvious examples of this such as funding -EMAs, Enrichment, QCF and probably more you can think of. But despite this nothing really changes and we are still left with the same old problems. However, here are some things which have not changed, but should, so providers are better able to manage change:

- **Core business!** (And the attention given to it) Even if you don't like it, this is a key issue that the current climate forces your institution -and all organisations-to be clear about. What is your core business? What *should* it be? And is this what you actually do? In reality, most staff actually spend most of their energy on all the changes above and can be distracted from the core business: What is missing is a concentration on one coherent, collective goal *only*, for instance 'producing effective learning' or 'continuously improving the service' i.e. 'core business', which should be a key stabiliser in change times.
- **'Core competence'** to enable core business: What is it? Again not easy to answer but something like 'the collective learning in the organisation to co-ordinate and integrate multiple products/offers' (choose your own term). The most effective sector providers already do this and are more resilient because of it. It is likely they will suffer less in the current climate.

Other contradictions the sector has long endured but really need changing:

- **Being poor organisational learners:** though providers of learning for others, as *collective* learners ourselves, we are often deficient. We need to be better at being learners ourselves.
- **Busted trust:** though teachers and managers are 'knowledge workers' they are managed by a 100 year-old model of management, a legacy from industrial working. 1 in 7 sector staff is now a manager. This is the key sector battleground, a struggle between control and trust. So far, control via Government(s) which is internalised by managers, has won, but cannot in future because higher performance needs higher trust. But trust isn't automatic, it can't be demanded, it has to be *earned*. This is our biggest challenge and up to us to build organisations round it.
- **Employee disengagement** -'just doing my job'; turning up - being present regardless of outcome; satisfying my manager; doing, yet not evaluating; obeying systems; 'doing what I have always done'; walking past a problem; being punctual but not productive; 'managing', rather than its desired outcome, generating commitment; or repeatedly planning without improving. Or a rich mixture of all these –and more –in collision.

3. Change we need more of

- **Using innovation** to attack the 'sacred cows' of learning organisations and achieve that supposedly impossible success. For example, Colin Hindmarch, Principal at Harlow College, has jettisoned the (soon to depart) Guided Learning Hours formula to develop a more principled 'job and finish' for teachers, once agreed learner outcomes are achieved, with transformational success. <<insert case study link>>
- **Accepting change earlier**: staff can wrest a little more control in change circumstances by seeking greater self-investment in the change process
- **'Jumping the S curve'**: a technique to judge performance and its implications. At the top of the cumulative curve of performance against time (the S curve) - performance may be at its height but it is the point *just before it begins to decline*. So intervention at this point can transform performance. The technique can be used at an individual or organisational level.

Starting points for reflection and discussion:

What is your core business?

What is your core competence?

Do you know what they look like for yourself? In others?

How can this help you/your organisation in the current climate?

If you don't like these questions please pose your own and let us know what they are.

So much for change –well that's my take –what is yours?

Donal Carroll