**Daniel Burger**
Consulting Industrial Psychologist
27 (0) 72 188 1315
Mail to: dh_burger@hotmail.com

*Phenomenological Perspectives on Change*


**ABSTRACT**

Although the age-old Empirical-Analytical Model with its focus on measurement is still very much dominant in most contemporary organisations, an increasing number of theorists and practitioners are recognising the importance of the individual experience in management and change processes. Given that this 'individual experience' has been a central focus of the Phenomenological Movement since its inception, this paper argues that an understanding and application of phenomenological principles may have much utility in organisational change efforts, especially considering the key role of the individual in achieving change. Whereas the first section of this paper provides a brief background on the Phenomenological Movement, the second section demonstrates the application of phenomenological principles in contemporary practices.

**Table of contents**

*Page Number*

**List of Tables**

## 1. Introduction

*Learning from [philosophers] will not only help organizations achieve business objectives, but allow human beings to flourish within the organization (Porth, McCall & Bausch, 1999, p. 212)*

The notion of change is inherent to the phenomenological movement. Central to the dominant perspectives within this school of thought is that humans are dynamic beings constantly in the process of becoming and of fulfilling potentialities (Gerdes, 1988; May, 1961). Apathy, or stagnation, is further viewed as an undesirable condition with dire consequences for the well-being of the individual (e.g. Frankl, 1984). This then reflects the prevailing belief that failure to change in the face of contemporary environments may threaten the survival of organisations (Newstrom & Davis, 1997). However, because the phenomenological perspective traditionally has an individual focus with little regard for wider generalisation (Hergenhahn, 1997), the applicability of this approach to wider phenomena such as organisational transformation may be questioned.

Although the role of the individual in bringing about transformation is increasingly being emphasised (Breu & Benwell, 1999), it is the aim of this paper to demonstrate the wider applicability of phenomenological principles in the context of organisational change. This is to be achieved by firstly tracing its historical roots to the philosophies of the Ancient Greeks, Georg Hegel, and the romantics. Subsequently, three expressions of modern phenomenology are explored, namely the gestalt movement, existentialism (including existential psychology and logotherapy), and humanistic psychology. Finally, the applicability of phenomenology to organisational change is demonstrated through a discussion of five contemporary trends in which its principles are apparent, namely the meaning of work, spirituality at work, values-based management, organisation development, and empowerment.

## 2. The roots of phenomenology

Phenomenology refers to a methodological approach to psychology and a variety of other disciplines that focuses on the introspective study of intact mental or cognitive experiences and events as it occurs, without attempting to reduce these experiences to its component parts, as such reduction will threaten the unity and integrity of the experience or event (Brennan, 1998; Hergenhahn, 1997). In the field of psychology alone, there are a multitude of different expressions of this approach. This section investigates the early philosophical roots of phenomenology.

### 2.1. The Greek influence

The roots of phenomenology lay in the philosophies of ancient Greeks such as Heraclitus (ca. 540-480 B.C.) and Socrates (469-399 B.C.). Inherent to the philosophy of Heraclitus is that *everything* in nature is in constant flux: "all things are in process and nothing stands still"

(Allen, 1966, p. 42). He expressed the notion of continuous change in his famous "The sun is new every day" and "You could not step twice in the same rivers; for other and yet waters are ever flowing on" (Smith, 1956, p. 11). Heraclitus stated that nothing can ever 'be' – rather, everything is constantly *becoming* (Hergenhahn, 1997). Permanence is an illusion – everything is constantly moving from its emergence (or birth) to its demise (Stace, 1920).

Socrates subscribed to the so-called *humanistic* orientation in Greek philosophy, which attempted to gain knowledge of phenomena by differentiating human beings from the rest of the world (Brennan, 1998). Socrates held that all knowledge (including physics, mathematics, and astrology) is relatively worthless compared to knowledge of the individual – which he called ethical knowledge (Stace, 1920). He rejected contentions that all truth is relative (Hergenhahn, 1997), and stated that a general understanding of life is required if there is to be human progress. Such a conception, he posited, is found in "the essential uniqueness of the individual" (Brennan, 1998, p. 23). Hergenhahn (1997) states that it is because of this focus on "what it means to be human and the problems related to human existence … that Socrates is sometimes referred to as the first existential philosopher" (p. 36). This is also evident in his famous expressions 'know thyself' and 'an unexamined life is not worth living'.

As may become apparent from the discussions in section 3, the philosophies of Heraclitus and Socrates had a substantial impact on the development of modern phenomenology. According to Pauchant (1995), Heraclitus in particular had a significant influence on the work of Nietzsche, Tillich, Buber, and Heidegger. In addition to this, these philosophers also had a more indirect impact upon the development of phenomenology by influence the work of Georg Hegel (Hergenhahn, 1997; Solomon; 1983).

### 2.2. Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Hegel (1770-1831) had a significant influence on the development of not only phenomenology, but also a number of other movements in philosophy. Russell (in Hergenhahn, 1997) affirms this contention by stating that at "the end of the nineteenth century, the leading academic philosophers … were Hegelians" (pp. 176-177). Heidegger (1982), a leading figure in the existentialist movement (section 3.2), confirms the importance of Hegel to philosophy by stating that he "saw and was able to see in philosophy so much more than was ever seen before" (p. 159). Hegel is perhaps most famous for his influence on the thinking of Karl Marx (Capra, 1983; Lichtheim, 1971; Norman & Sayers, 1980; Stevenson, 1987), but his philosophy also had a significant impact on the development of phenomenology.

Hegel maintained that true understanding can only be attained if one has a comprehension of 'The Absolute' – the "universe as an interrelated unity" (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 175). This focus on the 'whole', rather than on isolated parts, is a central tenet of modern phenomenology (see section 3). For Hegel, the whole of human history and intellect then constitutes a "progressive self-realization of this Absolute Spirit" (Stevenson, 1987, p. 54).

Such self-realisation takes place through a process that Hegel called the *Dialectic*. Briefly, this process takes place as follows: one point of view (the *thesis*) is met by its opposite (the *antithesis*) and a compromise is formed (the *synthesis*). Upon completion of this cycle, the synthesis becomes the thesis for a subsequent cycle, thus resulting in a continuous and progressive developmental process (Hergenhahn, 1997; Norman, 1976; Norman & Sayers, 1983; Solomon, 1983; Weil, 1970). Marx later adopted the dialectic into his analysis of social change, proclaiming that such change emerges from the contradictions inherent in society's classes (Capra, 1983). For Marx, the key to history did however not lay in a spiritual or cosmic domain (i.e. Hegel's Absolute), but in mankind's economic conditions (Calvez, 1970; Stevenson, 1987).

Hegel believed that to the extent that "the mind has not completed its journey toward "The Absolute", the individual experiences alienation, or self-estrangement (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 176). The key to make the dialectic possible, and thus decrease the distance between the self and The Absolute, is self-knowledge. This involves a strong sense of self-consciousness or awareness (Hegel, in Heidegger, 1982; Solomon, 1983). Marx also adopted the concept of alienation into his thinking, but maintained that such self-estrangement is a product of economic and social factors (particularly the division of labour), and not of a metaphysical relationship: it ensues when workers become estranged from factors such as their labour, the product of their labour, and their co-workers (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995).

Hegel's emphasis on self-awareness in establishing self-realisation (that is, the overcoming of alienation, Stevenson, 1987) is strongly reflected in existential philosophy (see section 3.2), and is viewed by some as the origins of self-actualisation theory (see section 3.3) (Hergenhahn, 1997). In particular, alienation can be viewed as a precursor to the notion of existential anxiety (section 3.2) (Aktouf, 1995). Moreover, some theorists see Hegel's philosophy as "the beginnings of phenomenology, which ultimately manifested itself in gestalt, humanistic, and existential psychology" (section 3) (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 176).

### 2.3. Romanticism

Romanticism emerged between the late 18th and mid 19th centuries and served as body of criticism against rationalism and empiricism - the dominant philosophies of the time. Rationalism prescribes the attaining of knowledge through logical reasoning by utilising the intellect (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995), while empiricism is based on gaining knowledge from examining the ideas that are derived from experience (Rosnow & Rosenthal, 1996). In contrast to both these schools of thought, the romantics held that the study of the total person - including irrational feelings and instincts - is the ideal way to attain knowledge about the nature of human beings (Hergenhahn, 1997). This perspective not only reflects that of Hegel, but also is central to the gestalt movement (Westen, 1996), existentialism, existential psychology, and humanistic psychology (Brennan, 1998).

The romanticists believed that the 'good life' was lived when one lived in accordance to one's inner nature. Science failed to create effective political and moral systems because humans were not viewed in totality, but rather as "victims of experience" [empiricists] or "vehicles by which some grandiose, rational principle was manifested [rationalists]" (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 183). Schneider (1999) points out that romanticism was not an irrational movement, but rather attempted to expand rationality so as to address the whole individual in its relation to the universe. Although Jean-Jacques Rousseau is commonly viewed as the father of romanticism (Hergenhahn, 1997), it is the work of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) that had a core impact on later phenomenological theorists.

Nietzsche is perhaps most (in)famous for his proclamation that 'God is Dead' (Brennan, 1998), and that science and philosophy was to blame (Hergenhahn, 1997). As a result, Nietzsche held, people no longer have God to rely on as a source of meaning, direction, and security. They are completely free, but also alone, forlorn, and singly responsible for the choices they make in life and any consequences that may result "without recourse to divine reassurance" (Brennan, 1998, p. 290). Nietzsche placed a precondition on human freedom by proclaiming that it can only be attained when one's will to power (that is, the acting out of inherent irrationalities) is utilised to create an "authentic" personality (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 192). One must look within oneself, gain self-knowledge, and act upon this knowledge. Such action will involve acting out instincts and will not only produce creativity, but will also result in one gaining control "over one's self and one's destiny" (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 193).

Ultimately, the above process will result in one reaching one's full potential and becoming an *Übermensch*. Nietzsche (1961) described this notion in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Here, the character Zarathustra describes the superiority the Übermensch enjoys over man as akin to the superiority of man over the ape. Furthermore, this superior being is to take the place of gods, who are all dead. Thus, the Übermensch is the solution to the dilemmas caused by the death of God. Nietzsche did not provide a universal conception of such an individual, and denied that any Übermensch had yet arisen. He did however mention individuals such as Socrates, Da Vinci, Michelangelo, Shakespeare, Goethe, Caesar, and Napoleon as models.

Nietzsche's ideas and beliefs had a lasting influence on psychology, particularly through its impact on prominent theorists such as Freud, Adler, and Jung. Furthermore, his influence on the development of existentialism is evident in Hergenhahn's (1997) view that Nietzsche "could as easily have been as easily labelled an existentialist" (p. 199). This may become apparent from the discussion in section 3.2.

## 3. Modern phenomenology

### 3.1. The gestalt movement

The gestalt movement emerged in Germany in 1912 as a reaction against Wundt's Structuralism (Louw & Edwards, 1993; Weiten, 1992). In particular, work by Max

Wertheimer, Wolfgang Köhler, and Kurt Koffka contributed to its development (Marx & Hillix, 1973). By 1930, this movement replaced Structuralism as the dominant model of psychology in Germany (Brennan, 1998). However, with the advent of Nazi anti-Semitism, Wertheimer, Köhler and Koffka fled to the United States (US), where they criticised Behaviourism (Hergenhahn, 1997; Marx & Hillix, 1973). Although the gestalt movement never attained the same status in the US as it had in Germany, it made a lasting mark on various schools of psychology. Not only was it responsible for considerable advances in the study of perception, problem solving, and social behaviour, but also contributed to the development of humanistic and cognitive psychology (Weiten, 1992).

The German word *gestalt* means form or configuration (Santrock, 1986). Accordingly, the gestalt movement viewed mental events as "organized, unified, and coherent phenomena" (Brennan, 1998, p. 213). These psychologists were fundamentally anti-reductionistic and thus opposed the scientific practice of splintering human behaviour and consciousness into elements to be studied (Louw & Edwards, 1993; Marx & Hillix, 1973). As is apparent from the central assumption that 'the whole is bigger than the sum of the parts' (Shaffer, 1978), the gestalt psychologists maintained that any reductionist attempt "results in the loss of the psychological event" (Brennan, 1998, p. 212). Instead of the reductionist or molecular approach, then, understanding is to be achieved by means of the 'molar approach'. This involves a focus on the phenomenological experience, that is, "mental experience as it occurred to the naive observer without further analysis" (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 403).

Although he is not considered a founder of the gestalt movement, Kurt Lewin (1890-1947) played a significant role in the application of gestalt principles in a variety of areas within psychology, including motivation, conflict, and group dynamics (Hergenhahn, 1997). Particularly relevant to the aims of this essay, Lewin (1951) further also developed what was to become presumably one of the most influential change management frameworks of the 20th century. Moreover, there "is little question that the intellectual father of contemporary theories of … planned change is Kurt Lewin" (Schein, 1994, p. 238). The significance of Lewin's change model is further demonstrated by the extent to which it is discussed in the organisational change management, organisation development, and organisational behaviour literature (e.g. Cummings & Worley, 2001; De Greene, 1982; French & Bell, 1999; Greenberg & Baron, 1993; Heller, 1998; Newstrom & Davis, 1997; Robbins, 1990, 1993). Schein (1992, 1994, 1996) later elaborated upon Lewin's model by describing the psychological processes necessary in each stage to bring about successful change. This elaborated model, then, is the subject of discussion for the remainder of this section.

Lewin (1951) proceeded from the assumption that behaviour at any particular moment in time is the result of two conflicting forces, namely driving forces and restraining forces (compare Hegel's dialectic, section 2.2). Whereas driving forces directs behaviour away from the status quo, restraining forces restricts such movement. When these two forces are equal, the status quo is maintained at a state of "quasi-stationary equilibrium" (Lewin, 1999, p. 279). Change, or movement from the equilibrium, is then facilitated by increasing the driving

forces and/or decreasing the restraining forces. This is achieved through three phases, namely unfreezing, moving, and refreezing (Lewin, 1951; 1999)

During unfreezing, motivation to change is created and the forces that maintain current behaviour are reduced. Present conceptions and practices are rejected in favour of new ones that need to be learned. Schein (1994, 1996) contends that the creation of a motivation to change during this phase is dependent upon three mechanisms. Firstly, there must be a sufficient amount of disconfirming data that create discomfort and disequilibrium in the organisation by indicating that organisational goals are not being met. A second outcome of such data is a state of anxiety or guilt that accompanies failure to meet important objectives. Finally, a state of psychological safety must be created to prevent such anxiety or guilt from resulting in a loss of identity or integrity, as this may result in individuals denying the disconfirming data and thus inhibit change.

Unfreezing results in individuals being open to "new sources of information and new concepts or new ways of looking at old information" (Schein, 1994, p. 245), thereby making the second phase, movement, possible. Critical in this phase is the implementation of interventions aimed at bringing about changes in behaviours, attitudes and values. Schein (1996) states that 'cognitive redefinition' is crucial is this phase if sustained behavioural change is to be achieved. Information that makes cognitive redefinition possible is obtained of two sources, namely *Identification*, which involves one learning the new state of things from somebody with which one can identify (e.g. a mentor, role model, or friend), and *Environmental Scanning*, which relates to searching for information that can help to address particular issues in the environment.

Finally, in the refreezing phase, the organisation is stabilised at a new equilibrium state by achieving a balance between the driving and restraining forces (Lewin, 1951). This prevents the changed behaviours and attitudes from reverting back to what they were before unfreezing. Schein (1994, 1996) proposes two mechanisms crucial to successful refreezing in the organisation. *Personal refreezing* involves relates to the degree to which the new behaviours or attitudes are congruent with one's personality to such an extent that it can be integrated comfortably. *Relational refreezing*, in turn, encompasses the extent to which one's "significant others will *accept and confirm* the new attitudes and behavior patterns" (Schein, 1994, p. 246; Emphasis in original). Through these two forms of refreezing the individual then gains confirmation of the information attained during moving; confirmation that is critical in preventing one from reverting back to the previous state.

Given the aims and scope of this essay, the current discussion of Lewin's work is limited to his model of change. Readers further interested in Lewin's work may consult Gold (1999). The remainder of section 3 constitutes a discussion of other dominant schools of thought within phenomenology, namely existentialism, logotherapy, and humanistic psychology.

### 3.2. Existentialism, existential psychology, and logotherapy

Existential psychology is based upon existential philosophy, a movement that originated in the 19th century and gained popularity after the Second World War (Brennan, 1998). Although modern existentialism was greatly influenced by the Greek philosophers and Nietzsche, the first modern expression thereof is found in the work of Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) (Hergenhahn, 1997). The focus of existentialism is "upon the existing person; it is the emphasis on the human being as he is becoming" (May, 1961, p. 16). The individual is depicted as being a "changing, ever-forming, creative source of will and action" (compare Heraclitus, section 2.1) (Westen, 1996, p. 480).

According to Hillner (1984) and Stevenson (1987), there are three concerns central to existentialism. Firstly, it focuses on the nature of the individual's existence or being. Secondly, it is concerned with the subjective meaning of life, rather than with scientific or metaphysical truths about the universe (Stevenson, 1987). The 'Ultimate nature of reality' is irrelevant, as it cannot be known (Hillner, 1984). Finally, individual freedom is the most distinctive human property (Stevenson, 1987) and extends beyond freedom of determinism to include "the choice of a culture, a metaphysics, and the meaning and significance of life" (Hillner, 1984, p. 258). These concerns are believed to be aspects of one common theme: that individuals have the freedom to determine their own attitudes, purposes, values, and way of life. Thus, the existentialists advocate that the "only 'authentic' and genuine way of life is that freely chosen by each individual for himself" (Stevenson, 1987, p. 90).

In addition to the above, Yalom (1980) asserts that existentialism is concerned with the 'four givens of the human condition', namely death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness. *Death* is the only certainty in life, and this awareness and creates great terror within the individual. *Freedom*, in turn, is an inescapable human condition; one that comes with great responsibility (see Nietzsche, Sartre, and Frankl). *Isolation* refers to the loneliness that results from the fundamental separateness that exists between people. Finally, meaninglessness results from the realisation that one is alone in the world – there is no inherent meaning in one's life or in the universe (Yalom, 1980). These assumptions are subsequently further illustrated by means of a brief discussion of the work of two central figures in existentialism, Martin Heidegger and Jean-Paul Sartre, and the father of logotherapy, Viktor Frankl.

### 3.2.1. Heidegger

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), a former student of the phenomenologist Edmund Husserl, was greatly influenced by the works of the pre-Socratic philosophers, Kierkegaard, and Nietzsche (Brennan, 1998; Steiner, 2001). According to Hergenhahn (1997), Heidegger's work created a bridge between existential philosophy and psychology. Blitz (2001, p. 106) further indicates the importance of Heidegger's work by stating that

> *Many consider Martin Heidegger to be the twentieth century's most significant*
> *philosopher. Arendt, Lowith, Strauss, Kojeve, Gadamer, and Marcuse studied with him;*

*Jaspers, Bultmann, Sartre, and Derrida wrote books heavily influenced by his work. Existentialism, deconstructionism, literary and art criticism, and environmentalism owe formulations, justifications, and sometimes the heart of their positions to his analyses.*

Heidegger utilised phenomenology as a methodology for investigating the "totality of human existence" (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 512). He believed that the individual and the world are inseparable – a concept indicated by the word *Dasein*. Translated to English, Dasein means being-in-the-world, with the hyphens indicating the inseparable relationship between the individual, the context, and temporal dimensions (Cummings & Brocklesby, 1997; Hergenhahn, 1997). Heidegger postulated that 'to be' involves existing, and existing involves constant and dynamic change (compare Heraclitus, section 2.1). One's existence is never static - rather, it is characterised by constant changes due to decisions. Although one has no choice regarding some of the circumstances that surrounds one (e.g. genetic, social and ethnic factors), these factors only determine the context in which one exercises one's freedom and defines one's own existence (Hergenhahn, 1997).

Like the other existentialists, Heidegger also placed great emphasis on the individual's experience of meaning in life. He believed that such meaning can only be found by living an 'authentic life', of which a critical element is the acceptance of one's mortality and "internalizing the subjective meaning of death" (Brennan, 1998, p. 298). Only when one makes this realisation can one exercise the uniquely human freedom to create a meaningful existence and achieve personal growth, thus facilitating one's becoming (Hergenhahn, 1997).

However, living an authentic life is not easy, as the realisation of one's finitude inevitably leads to feelings of isolation and powerlessness (Roffey, 1993). As a result, people experience anxiety, which they try to reduce by denying their mortality. This constrains self-knowledge and knowledge of possibilities and results in an inauthentic life (Hergenhahn, 1997). Individuals living inauthentically lose their individuality through conforming to the values, beliefs, and ideas of others (Bauman & Waldo, 1998). Thus, one's decisions are no longer directed by one's self-knowledge, thereby limiting one's growth and the finding of meaning. Such failure to express personal freedom in decisions results in the experience of existential guilt (Owen, 1994). Furthermore, because the inauthentic life is characterised by a denial of one's death, there is no urgency to realise one's potential. Heidegger describes this mode of being as 'fallenness' – a situation where one becomes preoccupied with daily concerns to such an extent that one is alienated from future possibilities (Mills, 1997).

Heidegger believed that the authentic life an individual meaning is also threatened by modern technological society. He used the phrase 'the age of Technicity' to describe the approach to reality that characterises the modern era (Chessick, 1996). Here, technology has transcended a way to produce something to embody an 'enframing' (or framework) of relating to or revealing reality (Blitz, 1995; Smith, 1991). In the modern age, technology has become a way to exploit nature and place its resources on standing reserve for future consumption.

Ultimately, all of Reality is revealed as such a standing reserve. Because one cannot distinguish oneself from reality, technology then also reveals oneself as a reserve that can be regulated and ordered (Blitz, 1995; Smith, 1991), or as an object that to be accumulated and distributed (Chessick, 1996). Thus, technology is essentially inauthentic and dehumanising and voids the human life of meaning by steering it away from self-direction (Blitz, 1995).

### 3.2.2. Sartre

The importance of the work of Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) within the school of existentialism is illustrated by the common misconception that the existential tradition emerged under his leadership (Pauchant, 1995). According to the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas (interviewed by Wolin, 1992), Sartre contributed to the "humanistic philosophy of freedom" (p. 466) embodied in Heidegger's *Being and Nothingness*. Finally, Abelson (1994, p. 1) confirms the significance of Sartre's works by stating that he

> *Combine[d] the phenomenology of the German philosopher Edmund Husserl, the metaphysics of the German philosophers G. W. F. Hegel and Martin Heidegger, and the social theory of Karl Marx into a single view called existentialism. This view, which relates philosophical theory to life, literature, psychology, and political action, stimulated so much popular interest that existentialism became a worldwide movement.*

The core of Sartre's philosophy is that 'existence precedes essence' (Sartre, 1957, 1981), or that "subjectivity must be the starting point" (Sartre, 1957, p. 2). This reflects Hegel's belief that "man doesn't have an essence; his essence is in his action" (Aktouf, 1995, pp. 126-127), which means that one's existence is not defined by one's potential, but by what one actually is, that is, by one's acts. There is no human nature – what human beings are, and what it means to be human, are all dependent on the decisions made by the individual (De Avila, 1995). In this, the notion of subjectivity is reflected – there is no objective truth to standard to being human. Human nature is as the individual experiences it.

Sartre (1957) posited that there are two meanings to subjectivism. Firstly, the "individual chooses and makes himself" (p. 3). Secondly, subjectivism relates to the impossibility of the individual to transcend human subjectivity. In this, Sartre thus asserted not only that one defines one's self through one's choices, but also that that which is subjective is all that one can know. Sartre rejects the notion of the unconscious altogether, proclaiming that one's consciousness is central to making decisions regarding one's being (Roffey, 1993). Hence, it is crucial that one continuously makes decisions in order to define one's self and to bring about one's growth: "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre, 1957, p. 3). It is further through making choices that one lives the authentic life and avoid what Sartre calls *mauvaise foi*, or 'living in bad faith' (Barash, 2001; Owen, 1994).

Like Nietzsche, Sartre (1957) proclaims that there is no God, which translates into the absence of an ultimate meaning or purpose inherent in one's life and Divine reassurance for

one's actions. Therefore, there is no external justification for the values anyone chooses to adopt; "the only foundation for values is human freedom" (Stevenson, 1987, p. 93). "Man is condemned to be free. Condemned, because he did not create himself, yet, in other respects is free; because, once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does" (Sartre, 1965, pp. 40-41). Meaning is thus the individual's own creation and own responsibility, and is found in life through the commitment to aspects such as values, ideals, people, and courses of action. However, one must simultaneously recognise that these things are finite and have no intrinsic meaning; meaning is only attached to these things to make one's life seem worthwhile (Westen, 1996).

### 3.2.3. Frankl

Largely due to his dissatisfaction with the theories of Freud and Adler, Viktor Frankl (1905-1997) developed his own distinct form of existential psychotherapy, known as logotherapy. The term logotherapy is based on the Greek word '*logos*', denoting meaning (Frankl, 1984). Frankl was fond of referring to an aphorism by Nietzsche to express the centrality of meaning in the individual's life: "He who has a why to live can bear with almost any how" (Allport, in Frankl, 1984, p. 12). Thus, the individual who has found meaning in his or her life can face almost any with almost any occurrences or circumstances. Frankl later confirmed many of his tenets through his experiences and observations in Nazi concentration camps during the Second World War (Havenga Coetzer, 1997; Hoffman, 1995, p. 19).

Frankl (1967; 1988) posited three triads as underlying logotherapy. The first consists of the freedom of will, the will to meaning, and the meaning of life. The latter – the meaning of life – encapsulates the second triad, which consists of creative, experiential, and attitudinal values. Finally, attitudinal values are subdivided into the third triad: meaningful attitudes towards the 'tragic triad' – suffering, guilt and transitoriness.

Frankl (1967) admits to the limiting influence that certain conditions may have on the individual, but rejects any notion of determinism by stating that one's ultimate *freedom of will* involves the freedom to choose one's attitude towards specific circumstances. Furthermore, Frankl regards the *will to meaning* as the individual's primary motivation in life - "man is always reaching out for meaning, always setting out on his search for meaning" (Frankl, 1978, p. 31). This *meaning of life*, then, is discovered through the realisation of *creative* values (creating something of value), *experiential* values (one's direct experiences), and *attitudinal* values (facing a fate one cannot change) (Frankl, 1967; 1986). These values encompass the second triad underlying logotherapy. The final triad, called the *tragic triad*, encompasses suffering, guilt, and the transitoriness of human existence (Frankl, 1967; 1984). These conditions are believed to threaten the individual's experience of meaning in life.

Frankl (1984; 1988) postulated that if people are unable to find meaning in their lives, they get caught in 'existential frustration'. This condition, which results from the lack of instincts, drives, and traditional values to guide one's behaviour, as well as the tragic triad, ultimately

gives rise to an 'existential vacuum', and, if prolonged, to 'noögenic neurosis'. The existential vacuum is mainly manifested in states of boredom, apathy, single-minded pursuits of sensory pleasures, and unquestioned conformity to the most dominant social trends (Das, 1998). Because noögenic neurosis has its origins in the 'noölogical' (from the Greek *noös*, meaning mind) dimension of human existence (Frankl, 1978, 1984), and not in the psychological dimension, this condition cannot be addressed by psychotherapy. Rather, *logo*therapy is to be applied when a person is "caught in the existential despair over the apparent meaninglessness of his life" (Frankl, 1988, p. 99). However, a critical element of logotherapy is that it is not aimed at providing the individual with meaning (Frankl, 1988, 1992). The logotherapist may rather be viewed as a facilitator in assisting individuals in discovering meaning, but finding meaning remains *the responsibility of the individual*. Discussions of the techniques used to fulfil this aim may be found in Das (1998), Fabry (1987, 1988), and Frankl (1967, 1978, 1984, 1986).

### 3.3. Humanistic psychology

The term 'Humanism' was originally used in the Renaissance (14th to 17th century) to designate a return to classical ideals and the study of humanities. In this tradition, then, humanistic psychology emphasises the synergy of the body and mind so as to bring about the development of human potential (Criswell, 2000). Humanistic psychology, or third force psychology, emerged in response to the determinism and empiricism preached by both the psychoanalysts (the first force) and the behaviourists (the second force) (Brennan, 1998). This third force approach differed dramatically from these systems of psychology that were popular at the time:

> *Humanistic psychology is primarily an orientation towards the whole of psychology rather than a distinct area or school. It stands for the respect for the worth of persons, respect for differences of approach, open-mindedness as to acceptable methods, and interest in exploration of new aspects of human behavior. As a "third force" in contemporary psychology, it is concerned with topics having little place in existing theories and systems: e.g., love, creativity, self, growth, organism, basic need-gratification, self-actualization, higher values, being, becoming, spontaneity, play, humor, affection, naturalness, warmth, ego-transcendence, objectivity, autonomy, responsibility, meaning, fair play, transcendental experience, peak experience, courage, and related concepts* (The American Association of Humanistic Psychology, cited in Shaffer, 1978, p. 2).

Thus, it is apparent that humanistic psychology emphasises the unique qualities of humans, including the existential qualities of freedom and the potential for personal growth (Weiten, 1992). Gerdes (1988, p. 60) asserts that this approach to psychology focuses on the whole person and his/her relationship to the world, and attempts to "reinstate man as a whole, mature being". Gerdes continues that the humanistic view is a "dynamic view of a person in the process of becoming, who is striving towards the realisation of his potential" (p. 60) (compare Heraclitus, section 2.1, and Heidegger, section 3.1). Similarly, Westen (1996)

contends that according to this approach, within each individual there is an active, creative force or self that seeks "expression, development and growth" (p. 479).

A distinguishing characteristic of humanistic theorists is their interest in the natural tendency of people to develop healthy characteristics (Louw & Edwards, 1993). Therefore, humanistic psychology is aimed at demonstrating that the individual is a free-thinking being in a constant process of growth towards a better self, rather than a helpless victim of internal drives and urges (psychoanalysis) or external environmental factors (behaviourism). These contentions are illustrated in the basic tenets of humanistic psychology, summarised in Table 3.1 below.

Table 3.1.
**The basic tenets of humanistic psychology** (Compiled from Criswell, 2000; Greening, 1998; Hergenhahn, 1997).

- The ultimate concern is with valuing the dignity and worth of humans and an interest in the development of the potential inherent in every person
- Human beings supersede the sum of their parts and cannot be reduced to components
- Little of value can be learned about people from animal studies
- Human behaviour is intentional, primarily guided by subjective reality, and strives for goals, meaning, value, and creativity
- The individual has choices, and with that, responsibilities
- Human beings are conscious (aware of being aware). Such consciousness includes an awareness of oneself in the context of other people
- People exist in both a uniquely human context and a cosmic ecology
- More is learnt from the study of individuals than of similarities between groups of individuals
- Attempts should be made to unmask that which enrich the experiences of the individual
- The addressing of human problems should be the focus of research
- Psychology should be aimed at completely describing the meaning of being a human being

The influence of existentialism on the development and basic postulations is evident from the above contentions. Nevertheless, these two schools of thought diverge with regard to a number of factors. For example, Fitch, Canada and Marshall (2001) contend that whereas the main focus of existentialism lay on the human condition, view of death, and lack of meaning in life, humanistic psychology is mainly concerned with actualising the individual's potential. Furthermore, Milton (1993) points out that existentialism emphasises the boundaries of human existence, whereas humanistic psychology focuses on human freedom and choice. Finally, Hergenhahn (1997) indicates that where humanistic psychologists view human nature as basically good, the existential psychologists believe that human nature is "essentially neutral" (p. 532), and unlike the existentialists, humanistic psychology does not attach great importance to the meaning of death in the individual's life. These contentions may be best illustrated by means of a discussion of the philosophy and theory of two leading figures in humanistic psychology: Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers.

### 3.3.1. Maslow

The influence of the works of Abraham Maslow (1908-1970), commonly regarded as the father of humanistic psychology, reached beyond psychology to other fields like "medicine, marketing, theology, education, and nursing" (Hergenhahn, 1997, p. 527). Furthermore, Bennis (in Maslow, 1998) points out that Maslow's 1965 Journals named *Eupsychian Management*, recently re-published as *Maslow on Management* (1998), has become a classic work in the application of humanistic psychological principles in industry, and has been mentioned in the same breath as management gurus such as Drucker, McGregor, and Likert.

Maslow believed that psychology was too negative in its constant focus on abnormal conditions. He proposed that psychology should rather take an optimistic view of human nature, as is apparent from his famous quote: "It is as if Freud supplied to us the sick half of psychology and we must now fill it out with the healthy half" (in Weiten, 1992, p. 442). This positive approach is particularly evident in his most famous work – the hierarchy of needs.

Maslow's (1969) theory states that human behaviour is motivated by a number of needs, which arrange themselves in a "hierarchy of prepotency" (p. 84). This hierarchy of needs consists of five levels, namely physiological needs (e.g. hunger, thirst); safety needs (e.g. housing, money); needs for love or belonging (e.g. intimacy); needs for esteem (e.g. respect from others), and needs for self-actualisation (to fulfil one's full, human potential). Each of these levels is then dependent upon the satisfaction of the previous level of needs (Greenberg & Baron, 1993; Hergenhahn, 1997; Hillner, 1984; Maslow, 1969; Newstrom & Davis, 1997; Schultz, 1981; Westen, 1996).

Self-actualisation, the highest form of human needs, serves as the basis of Maslow's theory of a healthy personality (Weiten, 1992). People who are satisfying their needs for actualisation are believed to have exceptionally healthy personalities, marked by continuous personal growth. Self-actualisation can never be completely attained – thus, people can never fulfil their full potential. For this reason, people will always be motivated in a direction that may contribute to such fulfilment (Maslow, 1969). Maslow identified a number of characteristics common to these individuals, some of which include spontaneity; simplicity; naturalness; autonomy and independence (of culture *and* environment); discrimination between good and evil; clear perceptions of reality and comfortable relations with it, and a clear purpose outside of oneself (Louw & Edwards, 1993, p. 647; Weiten, 1992, p. 443).

With regard to the workplace, Maslow (1998) believed that employment has the potential to provide individuals with a great opportunity to become self-actualising – an opportunity greater than that provided by education. He described a 'Eupsychian firm' as an organisation where all the managers are self-actualising. Through a process he called 'syndrome dynamics', this will then result in self-actualising employees, a healthier organisation, and ultimately, a better society. Central to this healthy firm is his theory of Enlightened Economics and Management, which is based on a number of assumptions (e.g. "everyone is

to be trusted", and all people have "the impulse to achieve" and "an active trend to self-actualization"; Maslow, 1998, pp. 20-42). However, Maslow was not naïve – he recognised a number of barriers to this Utopia, including a failure to satisfy basic needs; anti-synergic organizational regulations and laws, and factors that increase anxiety. Nevertheless, these barriers too can be overcome if the firm has self-actualising managers:

> *I would expect that if the management policy were truly growth fostering and truly better personality producing, that these individuals would, for instance, become more philanthropic in their communities, more ready to help, more unselfish and altruistic, more indignant at injustice, more ready to fight for what they thought to be true and good, etc.* (Maslow, 1998, p. 107).

One of Maslow's final interests was the development of a new kind of psychology that would transcend personal experiences and focus on the more spiritual and mystical aspects of human existence, thereby contributing to the overcoming of the nihilism, sickness and apathy of humankind (Hergenhahn, 1997). In the preface to the second edition of his "*Toward a Psychology of Being*" (1968), Maslow wrote, "I consider humanistic Third Force Psychology to be transitional, a preparation for a still 'higher' Fourth Psychology, transpersonal, transhuman, centered in the cosmos rather than in human needs and interests, going beyond humanness, identity, self-actualization and the like" (pp. iii-iv). However, Maslow passed away before he could take this dream to the same heights as humanistic psychology reached under his guidance.

### 3.3.2. Rogers

Like Maslow, Carl Rogers (1902-1987) argued that psychology should take an optimistic view of human nature (Weiten, 1992). He believed that people are essentially good, but that they become distorted by their experiences (Westen, 1996). Rogers theorised that people are motivated by an innate drive towards growth and self-actualisation. Those who reach their full potential are believed to be live according to the 'organismic valuing process', through which experiences inconsistent with the actualisation principle is avoided or terminated, and consistent experiences are maintained (Hergenhahn, 1997). Ultimately, this will result in the individual being 'fully functioning' (Louw & Edwards, 1993), but only if they are free from unhealthy social and psychological influences (Fitch et al., 2001).

However, many people do not live according to the organismic valuing process, as their need for positive regard (e.g. warmth, sympathy and acceptance) is often not met in their childhood. Instead, conditions for worth emerge, which involve situations where children only get positive regard if they act in particular ways. As prescribed values serve to direct the one's thoughts and behaviour, rather than one's own beliefs and values, the person becomes progressively more incongruous (or inauthentic, see section 3.2) (Hergenhahn, 1997). Client Centred therapy, then, is aimed at overcoming such incongruence. Rogers (1987, p.1 of appendix A) expresses the central hypothesis of this approach as follows:

*It is that the individual has within him or herself the vast-resources for self-understanding, for altering his or her self-concept, attitudes and self-directed behavior – and that these resources can be tapped if only a definable climate of facilitative psychological attitudes can be provided.*

Rogers (1990) postulated that such a growth-facilitating climate can exist within a relationship if a number of conditions are present. Firstly, two people are in a psychological contract. Secondly, the first individual (usually a client) is in a state of incongruence. Thirdly, the second person (usually a therapist) is congruent or genuine. Fourthly, the 'therapist' expresses unconditional positive regard to the 'client'. Fifthly, the 'therapist' expresses an empathic understanding for the 'client'. Finally, the communication of the therapist's positive regard and empathy for the client is (at least minimally) achieved (Rogers, 1990).

Rogers believed that growth can take place in any relational context - thus not only in a therapeutic setting - if the above conditions are present (Hergenhahn, 1997; Ikemi & Kubota, 1996). The ultimate goal of establishing such a climate is then to change behaviour by assisting individuals to live in accordance with their organismic valuing process and therefore achieve the actualisation of their potential. People who live in such a way, and are thus fully functioning, are believed to be characterised by autonomy; realistic and accurate perceptions of the self, others and the world; openness to personal feelings (i.e. non-defensiveness), and the ability to direct one's life with one's emotions (Louw & Edwards, 1993).

Section 3 provided an overview of three dominant modern expressions of phenomenology, namely the gestalt movement, existentialism, and humanistic psychology, as well as of the theories of leading figures within these movements. The subsequent section constitutes a discussion of five specific instances where phenomenology finds expression in contemporary approaches to change facilitation, namely the meaning in work; spirituality at work; organisation development; values-based management, and empowerment.

## 4. Contemporary expressions of phenomenological perspectives in change facilitation

### 4.1. The meaning of work

*All humans prefer meaningful work to meaningless work (Maslow, 1998, p. 39).*

A common theme in contemporary business and academic literature is the necessity of creating a sense of meaning or purpose in the workplace (Castillo, 1997; Dollarhide, 1997; Dolliver, 2002; Gratton, 2000). Morin (1995, p. 56) argues that the centrality of finding meaning in work has become "inevitable as a result of the weakening of religious and spiritual systems". The past few decades have been characterised by "a gradual undermining of many organizations and institutions that people have traditionally turned to for a sense of belonging" (Heil et al., 2000, p. 119). These institutions, which include the family, churches and communities, also used to provide one with meaning, affiliation, identity and support

(Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1994). As a consequence of one's failure to find purpose in these institutions, one then looks to the workplace to find meaning in one's life. This is particularly evident in the following statement by Miller, Burack and Albrect (1980):

> *Throughout its history, work has always been held in high regard. A man's job was his contribution to progress, his means of earning a livelihood. If he lost his job, he was deprived of his basic purpose in life* (pp. 448-449).

Miller et al.'s perspective is substantiated by Wolfe (1997), who states that people find more of themselves in work, resulting in a loss of meaning when they are not working. Similarly, Karl Marx believed that work is the "primary human activity" that holds "the key to human happiness and fulfilment", and that work can provide the means to "fulfil people's potential" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995, p. 179). This is consistent with Maslow's (1998) belief that employment has the potential to provide individuals with a great opportunity to become self-actualising (see section 3.3.1). However, Marx also pointed out that work has the potential to create alienation and to "distort and pervert [one's] nature and [one's] relationships with others" (Haralambos & Holborn, 1995, p. 179). Again, Maslow (1998) agrees with Marx by stating that "if work is meaninglessness, then life comes close to being meaningless" (p. 39). Given the assumption that a lack of meaning poses a significant threat to the psychological well-being of individuals (see section 3), it is apparent that meaningful work is central to the actualisation of the individual's potential. This is evident in the following view of the French existentialist Albert Camus – "Without work all life goes rotten. But when work is soulless, life stifles and dies" (cited in Gemmill & Oakley, 1992, p. 358).

The significance of meaningful work, however, transcends individual well-being and actualisation. Gratton (2000, p. 3) contends "the companies that flourish in this decade will do so because they are able to provide meaning and purpose, a context and frame that encourages individual potential to flourish and grow". Accordingly, Heil et al. (2000) argues that individuals strive to be committed to a worthy cause that "deepens their commitment, and lends meaning to their work" (p. 121). If organisations fail to exemplify a cause that provides employees with "a shared sense of identity and purpose", these individuals will search for such meaning in other contexts (Heil et al., 2000, p. 120); contexts which may be far removed from organisational goals (Gratton, 2000). Thus, if employees fail to find meaning in the workplace, it may jeopardise their organisational commitment. Such commitment is essential to sustain organisational competitiveness amidst constant change, and organisational change "will be successful only if the human resources of the organization is supportive of [the changes]" (Mohrman & Lawler, 1999, p. 435). Thus, meaningful work may be essential for effective organisational change.

However, it may also be argued that the individual's experience of meaningful work may actually *threaten* the success of organisational change. Frances (1995) argues that one's job has a significant role in defining one's identity and what the existential psychologist George

Kelly called 'Core Constructs' – relatively stable meaning structures that helps one to make sense of the world. Because organisational change implies progression or improvement, it then nullifies the meaning that has been created in the past, thereby resulting in individuals resisting these changes. Similarly, Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) state that resistance to change often emerges when individuals "think that they will lose something of value as a result of [organisational change]" (p. 107). This "something of value", then, may involve the aspects of one's work in which one finds meaning.

From the above arguments, it is apparent that the individual's experience of meaning in his or her work may have a substantial impact on the success of organisational change initiatives. Of particular significance is the creation of a sense of purpose in the organisation, which, according to Leigh (1997), requires the realisation that people "come to work with more than their bodies and minds; they bring individual talents and unique spirits" (p. 26). This clearly reflects a number of phenomenological principles. A discussion of how to create such a purpose is beyond the scope of this paper (see Bartlett & Ghoshal, 1994; 1995; Ghoshal & Bartlett, 1996; Gratton, 2000; O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000). However, Maslow's (1998) words provide great insight into how this may be accomplished: "all become meaningful or meaningless by virtue of [employees'] participation or lack of participation in a meaningful or important or loved goal" (p. 39). In addressing resistance to change that results from a threat to one's experience of meaning, Lewin's change model (section 3.1), as well as Rogers' conditions for the creation of personality change (section 3.3.3) may be considered.

### 4.2. Spirituality at work

The notion of spirituality at work constitutes another growing trend in which a number of phenomenological elements are evident. According to Mitroff and Denton (1999), recent years have been characterised by an increasing amount of literature concerning spirituality, spirituality at work, and its positive implications for organisations. Propositions here include that money is no longer a central motivating aspect in many people's jobs, and that an increasing amount of people want to fulfil their higher-order needs in their work. Miller (in Konz & Ryan, 1999) similarly emphasises this growing trend by stating that "spirituality in general, and in the workplace in particular, has become an important topic in recent years, reaching even the front page of the *Wall Street Journal*" (p. 200).

According to Benjamin and Looby (1998), individual wellness has 6 elements – physical, emotional, mental, social, occupational, and *spiritual*. Kriger & Hanson (1999) emphasise the importance of the spiritual element by contending that "one meaning of 'to be healthy' is to be 'whole'; and to experience wholeness is the very essence of what it means to be spiritual" p. 305). This clearly reflects the anti-reductionistic sentiments of the phenomenological movement. Furthermore, various authors in this tradition emphasise the importance of spirituality in finding meaning (e.g. Frankl, 2000) or to achieve self-actualisation (see Benjamin & Looby, 1998, for a discussion of spirituality in the theories of Maslow and Rogers). However, Mitroff and Denton (1999) point out research findings that people are

much more able to exhibit their mental capacities (e.g. intelligence and creativity) than their spiritual elements (e.g. emotions) at work. This sentiment is commonly expressed in beliefs like "the only thing spiritual about my work is the bottom line" (Freshman, 1999, p. 319).

However, findings such as these are hardly surprising, given the legacy of the Weberian bureaucracy in many contemporary organisations (for example, a focus on rationality and impersonal relations; Robbins, 1990). Furthermore, Mitroff and Denton (1999) report that people experience a separation or compartmentalisation of parts of themselves – 'their brains and emotions' - at work. Kilcourse (1994) states that such fragmentation of the individual – "to retain the "positive" qualities like obedience and loyalty while rejecting the "negative attributes such as irreverence and scepticism" (p. 38) – voids the job of meaning and "result only in alienation" (p. 38). The solution to this issue, Kilcourse (1994) maintains, is to focus on the unique human spirit and the whole person. The spirituality at work movement, then, propagates changes in organisations that facilitate individuals bringing *the complete self* to work (Mitroff & Denton, 1999). A central assumption, however, is that spirituality is not dependent upon any religious framework, but rather incorporates elements such as gaining a greater awareness of the self (King & Nicol, 1999, p. 234), achieving interconnectedness (Mitroff & Denton, 1999), and ultimate values (such as truth, trust, freedom, justice, creativity, and a higher purpose) (Butts, 1999).

Milliman, Ferguson, Trickett and Condemi (1999) present a model for achieving a spiritual values-based organisation. This model consists of four elements, namely organisational spiritual values, business and employee plans and goals, reinforcing HRM practices, and outcomes. The organisation's spiritual values represent its sense of spirituality and purpose, or its 'soul'. These values then determine the organisation's mission and objectives, which, in turn, determine the HRM practices required to buttress the organisation's spiritual values. Finally, the preceding steps are believed to result in higher organisational performance and changes in employee attitudes and spirituality. Similarly, Konz and Ryan (1999, p. 202) state stating that spirituality positively affects organisational performance, creativity, satisfaction, team performance, and organisational commitment, whereas Mitroff and Denton (1999, p. 83) contend that "organizations viewed as more spiritual get more from their participants".

According to Milliman et al. (1999), the central question in spirituality in business involves how organisations and individuals "put their spiritual values to work so that they can find higher purpose and meaning in life" (p. 224). This indicates that spirituality at work is related to both the notion of meaning at work (section 4.1) and values-based management (section 4.3). Furthermore, as is the case with meaning, spirituality is deeply personal to the individual. Subsequently, any change interventions in the organisation based on spirituality at work should treat individuals and their beliefs with respect (Freshman, 1999). Moreover, this personal nature of spirituality may also result in such interventions being met with resistance (Konz & Ryan, 1999). For these interventions to be successful, then, the spiritual goals of the organisation must be consistent with employee needs, beliefs, and aspirations (Collins &

Porras, in Milliman et al., 1999). Also, employees "must know what behaviors and beliefs are congruent with the spirituality of the organization" (Konz & Ryan, 1999, p. 203). Finally, Mitroff and Denton (1999) stress the importance of not only recognising, but also harnessing spirituality by stating that unless "organizations learn how to harness the "whole person" and the immense spiritual energy that is at the core of everyone, they will not be able to produce world-class products and services" (Mitroff & Denton, 1999, p. 83).

### 4.3. Values-based management

The notion of values-based management was largely popularised by Peters and Waterman in their 1982 bestseller *In Search of Excellence*. These authors studied a large number of 'excellent companies' and found that

> *Every excellent company we studied is clear on what it stands for, and takes the process*
> *of value shaping seriously. In fact, we wonder whether it is possible to be an excellent*
> *company without clarity on values and without having the right sorts of values* (Peters &
> Waterman, 1982, p. 280).

Similarly, Collins and Porras (1994) reported in their *Built to Last* that maximising profit was not the primary goal of any of the 'visionary companies' that they studied. Rather, each company attributed its success to its system of core values. Finally, O'Reilly and Pfeffer (2000) present case studies of a number of high-performing companies in a number of different industries, each of which is famous for its strong values and sense of purpose. These views are then summarised by Dolan and Garcia (2002), who state that high quality performance requires that "the qualitative factors or values, such as trust, creativity and honesty, are of equal or greater importance than the traditional economic concepts like efficiency or return on investment" (p. 103).

Thus, basing the management of the organisation's people on values is central to organisational success. In the context of organisational change, values may become even more important. For example, the importance of transformational leadership in bringing about effective change has received considerable attention in the literature (e.g. Eisenbach, Watson & Pillai, 1999; Landrum, Howell & Paris, 2000; Larwood & Falbe, 1995). Central to this form of leadership is the communication and enactment of a vision for the future (Guest & Schepers, 1997). Values, then, are inextricably linked to a vision (Schuler, Jackson & Storey, 2001).

From another perspective, Nguyen-Huy (2000) presents and argument that transformational change is mediated by emotion-based trust, which, in turn, depends on the enactment of humanistic values during the change effort. Humanistic values, according to this author, include diversity, humility, integrity, and justice. If change efforts violate these values, employees may exhibit behavioural resistance to change. From his research, Nguyen-Huy (2000) then identifies a number of examples of such resistance, which include a reduction in

the sharing of knowledge and the taking of risks; passive compliance and 'foot-dragging'; increased absenteeism and turnover, and undermining authority. Given the devastating effect that such resistance may have on the outcomes of organisational change (Boles & Sunoo, 1998; Frazee, 1996; Schiemann, 1992), it is then apparent that values play a central role in the success of such efforts.

A final illustration of the importance of values in the success of organisational change efforts is found in the change programme that Hewlett-Packard (HP) performed in the early 1990s. Faced with "increased competition, sluggish markets, decreased profitability, and a declining stock market evaluation" (Hope Hailey, 1999, p. 108), HP decided to undertake a substantial downsizing in 1992. Although morale was 'dented', 92 per cent of the employees reported that they were still willing to exert more effort than is formally required to contribute to the organisation's success. Such 'organisational citizenship behaviours' (OCBs) are central to successful organisational change efforts (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999), as is evident in HP's improvement from "a break-even position in 1992" to profits of 85 million US dollars in 1993 (Hope Hailey, 1999, p. 108). A great deal of this success, then, is attributed to HP's culture of openness, support, and teamwork. However, underlying all of this are HP's values, as encompassed in the so-called 'HP Way':

> *Confidence in and respect for our people as opposed to depending upon extensive rules, procedures and so on; which depends on people to do their job right (individual freedom) without constant directives* (Cited in Hope Hailey, 1999, p. 109).

From the above discussions, the potential centrality of values in organisational success is apparent. Dolan and Garcia (2002) substantiate this by positing values as the "glue" that is "used to hold an organization together when confronted with the need for change and when things get rough" (p. 115). These authors continue that "shared beliefs and values … provide the most important key to understanding and facilitating human conduct at work" (p. 116). A values-based organisation implies that the only obligation one has is towards one's own principles, "which [one] he shares, ideally, with his colleagues and his company as an entity" (Dolan & Garcia, 2002, p. 116). This emphasises not only Maslow and McGregor's propositions that individual needs should be aligned to organisational goals (see section 4.4 below), but also the existential and logotherapeutic belief that values are a primary source of meaning in the individual's life (Fabry, 1987; 1988; Sartre, in Westen, 1996). Finally, Kriger and Hanson (1999) illustrate the importance of values amidst constant change by stating that

> *When all is changing in a turbulent world, upon what are we to rely? It is our values … that allow us to transcend the forces of constant change and to define a deeper sense of meaning and existence* (p. 307).

## 4.4. Organisation development

Organisation development (OD) refers to "a system wide application of behavioral science knowledge to the planned development, improvement, and reinforcement of the strategies,

structures, and processes that lead to organizational effectiveness" (Cummings & Worley, 2001, p. 1). According to Muchinsky (2000), the origins of OD lay in attempts to understand group dynamics better and to make the workplace more humanistic. OD therefore constitutes a deviation from traditional management approaches like Taylor's scientific management and Weber's bureaucracy, which focus on organisational goals to such an extent that the needs and dynamics of the people in the organisation are often neglected (Heil et al., 2000).

French and Bell (1990) conceptualise the organisation as consisting of six interdependent subsystems, namely the External Interface, Human-Social, Task, Technological, Structural, and Goal subsystems. According to these authors, then, "the human-social subsystem is the initial change target" (p. 54) of OD interventions. This subsystem involves both formal and informal aspects. Whereas the formal elements include aspects such as the skills and abilities of organisational members; leadership philosophy and style, and personnel subsystems (such as staffing, rewards, and appraisal), the informal aspects generally refer to non-programmed activities and interactions and involve aspects such as resistant and competitive behaviours and coalitions and norms, values, emotions, and status (French & Bell, 1990, pp. 53-54). Consistent with this 'human focus' of OD, then, De Greene (1982, p. 54) states that the

> *biggest impact of OD … may not be on objective organizational outputs like productivity and profits in specific companies, but rather on maintaining, perhaps even increasing, the collective momentum towards more humanistic organizations.*

Contentions of a humanistic basis of OD may largely be the product of the influence of prominent figures in humanistic psychology like Maslow, Rogers (see section 3.3), and Douglas McGregor. McGregor not only made substantial contributions to the application of both behavioural scientific knowledge and humanistic psychological principles (many of which were convergent with the work of Maslow) in industry, but his Theory Y also reflects a number of fundamental humanistic psychological principles (Heil et al., 2000). Both Maslow and McGregor believed that one is inherently motivated towards fulfilling one's needs, and that the alignment of one's needs with organisational goals would contribute to organisational performance (Heil et al., 2000; Maslow, 1998). Ignoring individual needs may therefore inhibit organisational effectiveness. Similarly, it was pointed out as in section 3.3 that Rogers (1987) believed in the individual's inherent resources for growth if there is a facilitative climate. The utilisation of this inherent human potential, then, requires that organisational conditions are arranged in such a way that people can achieve their best by directing their efforts toward organisational objectives (McGregor, 2000*b*). These assumptions are reflected in the values and assumptions underlying OD, as presented in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1.

**Assumptions and values underlying OD**  (adopted from Hellriegel & Slocum, 1989, p. 800;
Newstrom & Davis, 1997, p. 417)

| Assumptions | Values |
|---|---|
| *Individuals:*<br>• People want to grow and mature, and have much to offer that is not being used at work<br>• Most employees desire the opportunity to contribute (they desire, seek, and appreciate empowerment) | *Individuals:*<br>• OD aims to overcome obstacles to the natural human tendency to grow, enabling employees to contribute more to the organisation<br>• OD stresses open communication and treating employees with genuine dignity and respect |
| *Groups:*<br>• Groups are critical to organisational success<br>• Groups have powerful influences on individual behaviour<br>• The complex roles to be played in groups require skill development | *Groups:*<br>• Hiding feelings or not being accepted by the group diminishes individual willingness to solve problems constructively<br>• Acceptance, collaboration, and involvement lead to expressions of feelings and perceptions |
| *Organisation:*<br>• Excessive controls, policies and rules are detrimental<br>• Conflict can be functional if properly channelled<br>• Individual and organisational goals can be compatible | *Organisation:*<br>• The way groups are linked influence their effectiveness<br>• Change should start at the top and gradually be introduced through the rest of the organisation<br>• The group links the top and bottom of the organisation |

Schein (1994, p. 7) expresses the importance of humanistic psychology for the success of the organisation in the following:

> *...given [rapid change] that requires a great adaptive capacity on the part of organizations, how can internal environments be created such that members of organizations will be enabled to grow in their own unique capacities? The underlying assumption is that unless such personal growth takes place, the organization will not be prepared to cope effectively with an unpredictable changing external environment.*

From the discussion in section 3.3, it is apparent that adherence to humanistic principles may enable OD to contribute to the personal growth that Schein (1994) denotes as possibly crucial for successful organisational change. Subsequently, a number of OD interventions take into consideration these and other phenomenological principles. In general, these interventions are aimed at establishing a 'helping' relationship in one of five target areas, namely the individual, dyads/triads, teams and groups, intergroup relations, or the total organisation (French & Bell, 1999). Despite this classification, however, the assumption is that an intervention at any level will improve organisational effectiveness. A full discussion of the wide variety of OD interventions available to achieve these aims is beyond the aims and

scope of this paper. The interested reader may consult texts such as Cummings & Worley (2001) and French and Bell (1999) for more information in this regard.

### 4.5. Empowerment and participation

Empowerment was largely born out of Group dynamics research in the mid-20th century, which indicated that people desire increased involvement in the workplace (French & Bell, 1999) and was later popularised by the 'Excellence' and 'Total Quality Management' (TQM) movements (Appelbaum & Honeggar, 1998). Regarding the former, Peters and Waterman (1982) found that 'excellent companies' achieve "productivity through people" (p. 235) through factors such as decentralised decision-making and "[treating] people as adults" (p. 277). Similarly, a central assumption in TQM is that quality can be improved by more decentralised decision-making (Newstrom & Davis, 1997). Payne (2000) argues that movements such as these provide examples of how a number of humanistic principles, as propagated by Maslow (1998), have been applied in the workplace, thus providing preliminary support to the proposition that empowerment constitutes an expression of phenomenological theory in the organisational change context. Further potential support for this proposition is subsequently indicated.

Empowerment is a "[f]orm of decentralization that involves giving subordinates substantial authority to make decisions" (Byars & Rue, 2000, p. 490), and involves "any process that provides greater autonomy to employees through the sharing of relevant information and the provision of control over factors affecting job performance" (Newstrom & Davis, 1997, p. 227). Empowerment strategies are particularly relevant in contemporary organisational environments, as it makes the makes the downsizing of mid-level management possible (Muchinsky, 2000). Furthermore, professional and specialist employees, who make up the largest category of the workforce, cannot effectively be utilised with practices that were developed to manage the "blue-collar wage earner" (McGregor, 2000, p. 147), as these 'knowledge workers' do not accept traditional authoritarian leadership (Abbasi & Hollman, 1993). McGregor's (2000) solution to this problem, then, is self-direction and self-control – elements central to empowerment *and* the movements within phenomenology.

According to Erstad (1997), empowerment has two essential elements, namely the education (or training) of employees and participative decision-making. Regarding the former, Hyland, Sloan and Barnett (1998) argue that continued training of employees is critical if the goals of empowerment are to be realised, as these require a variety of new skills from employees (e.g. teamwork, decision-making). Walton (in Rodrigues, 1994), in turn, contends that training is central to both socialising employees to organisational values and to "signal an organization's desire for greater employee involvement and its reciprocal commitment to increasing employee welfare" (p. 33). From a phenomenological perspective, one may argue that training and education contributes to individual self-awareness and growth, thereby facilitating authenticity and self-actualisation.

Participation, also known as participative decision-making or participative management, encapsulates the "mental and emotional involvement of people in group situations that encourages them to contribute to group goals and share responsibility for them" (Newstrom & Davis, 1997, p. 229), and involves activities such as goal setting, problem-solving, and employee involvement in decision-making (Rodriguez, 1994, p. 30). French and Bell (1999) indicate the crucial importance of participation by stating that "[p]articipation enhances empowerment, and empowerment in turn enhances performance and individual well-being" (p. 88). Newstrom and Davis (1997) support this contention by stating that participation not only fulfils the employees' needs for "a sense of significance, the opportunity to use their minds, and a chance to devote their efforts to a higher purpose of work" (p. 231), but also improves employee motivation, job satisfaction, self-esteem, cooperation with management, and commitment to goals; reduces conflict and stress; increases employees' acceptance of change (also see Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Waddell & Sohal, 1997), and ultimately enhances organisational productivity and performance. Given these benefits, then, Table 4.2 below provides a number of suggestions regarding how the organisation can create an environment that is facilitative of empowerment and participation.

Table 4.2.
**Organisational elements that may facilitate empowerment and participation** (compiled from Appelbaum & Honeggar, 1998; Chapman, 2002; Erstad, 1997; Nixon, 1994; Robbins, 1993)

| | |
|---|---|
| • Promote trust - between management and employees *and* among employees | • Job enrichment |
| • Self-managed work-teams | • High levels of vertical and horizontal communication |
| • Reduced formalisation | • Delegation of authority |
| • Collaboration | • Structuring jobs for intrinsic feedback |
| • Continuous improvement | • A clear vision and values |
| • Unrestrictive systems and processes | • Relevant, whole tasks |
| • Goal setting | • Education, training and development |
| • Promotion of employee-self-management | • An organisational structure that promotes learning and development |
| • Positive feedback | • Sufficient growth opportunities |
| • Skill recognition | |

From the above, it is apparent that empowerment and participation constitute an embodiment of Maslow and McGregor's belief that organisational success may be promoted by aligning individual needs with organisational goals. Following Newstrom and Davis (1997) above, it may further be deduced that empowerment and participation may also make a significant contribution to the individual's search for meaning in the workplace. Support for this contention is found in Kanungo's (1992) proposition that the self-determination inherent in empowerment addresses the powerlessness that ultimately culminates in alienation and "retards the development of the universal nature of human beings, that is, the realization of one's potentialities" (p. 415). Finally, Quinn and Spreitzer (in French & Bell, 1999) indicate

that like growth and authenticity (see section 3.2), successful empowerment is ultimately dependent upon individual choice:

> *Empowerment, then, is not something that management does to employees, but rather a mind-set that employees have about their roles in the organization. While managers can create a context that is more empowering, employees must choose to be empowered. They must see themselves as having freedom and discretion; they must feel personally connected to the organization, confident about their abilities, and capable of having an impact on the system in which they are embedded* (p. 88).

## 5. Summary and final thoughts

Although the historical roots of the phenomenological movement date back as far as the Ancient Greek philosophers, and its post-World War Two popularity greatly diminished more than three decades ago, many of its core principles are present in a number of more contemporary approaches to philosophy, psychology, and management. In particular, a number of authors agree that phenomenological principles such as individual self-direction, freedom, discretion and choice, autonomy, and growth and development are essential to accomplishing effective organisational change. These conclusions emerged from discussions of the historical roots of phenomenology and the dominant schools of thought within this movement, as well as of a number of contemporary expressions of phenomenological principles in organisational change facilitation.

As was alluded to in section 3, a central assumption to phenomenology is that people and their behaviour can be best understood if the individual's personal, subjective experiences are appreciated. Such an understanding is facilitated through the study of the interpretation of the account people give of their experiences (Weiten, 1992). According to Huysamen (1993), this approach directly opposes positivism – the movement based upon the natural-scientific approach to enquiry (Brennan, 1998). As the dominant model of epistemology and scientific inquiry, positivism has exerted a significant influence on the change facilitation and strategic management literature, particularly with regard to its strong emphasis on rationality, quantifiable goals, and clearly defined problems. However, these perspectives have been criticised by a significant number of authors (e.g. Bowman, 1999; Crous, 1997; Gratton, Hope Hailey, Stiles & Truss, 1999; Mintzberg, 1994; Truss, 1999; Weir & Smallman, 1998). Central to many criticisms is that rational models are not effective in uncertain and instable environments (Lester, Piore & Malek, 2002), and that they fail to engage people on an emotional level (O'Reilly & Pfeffer, 2000). One result of the latter criticism, then, is the fragmentation (and alienation) of the individual (see section 4.2).

In contrast, the application of phenomenological principles as discussed in this paper may contribute to the utilisation of the 'whole' person and to individuals being treated like people, thereby facilitating their finding of meaning in their jobs. The result of this may be increased organisational commitment and organisational citizen behaviours (OCBs) – both of which are

prerequisites for successful organisational change (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999; Mohrman & Lawler, 1999). Furthermore, Lester et al. (2002) hold that phenomenological research's (e.g. the Interpretivist approach) focus on interpretation and understanding facilitates and harnesses the creativity and innovation required to deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty that is characteristic of contemporary organisational environments. Finally, it may be concluded from the preceding sections that the stimulation of individuals' actualisation tendencies may evoke behaviours that can make substantial contributions to the success of change efforts, and ultimately to organisational effectiveness. In this way, phenomenology may thus be of great value in ensuring organisational success in contemporary environments.

In the wider South African context, phenomenology may also have a valuable role to play. In the past few years, this country has been characterised by radical transformation in its transition from an Apartheid state to a state with purportedly one of the most democratic constitutions in the world. This then creates a plethora of opportunities for phenomenological research to make a contribution towards the building of a 'better' South Africa. For example, the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR) has launched a number of phenomenological research initiatives in this country. One such study constitutes an analysis of the transcripts of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) hearings in order to assess the impact of the TRC at different levels (CSVR, 2001).

Further research may address aspects such as the meanings that people ascribe to the 'new' diverse South Africa, their experience of the transition, and fears and hopes that they may have regarding the future. In the work context, phenomenological research may be utilised to investigate aspects such as the experience of and meanings attached to affirmative action by both those advantaged (Blacks, women, people with disabilities) and disadvantaged (white males) by this measure. In this way, phenomenology may thus render knowledge that may be of significant value in creating a meaningful context for all South Africans.

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