

# Managing Organizational Change

Process, Social Construction and  
Dialogue

Second Edition

Lecture Notes Chapter 9

# 9

## **MODES OF INTERVENING**

## Learning objectives

By the time you have completed your study of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define the act of intervention.
- Explore covert and overt levels of intervention.
- Describe the role of organizational icebergs in the planning of interventions.
- Discuss the role of communication in facilitating interventions.
- Describe Blake and Mouton's five modes of intervention.
- Describe Harrison's notion of 'depth' and its relevance in managing intervention.
- Discuss the role of discourse in implicating intervention.

## *Lets' re-cap ...*

Chapters 7 and 8 contrasted **problem-centric modes** with **appreciative-centric modes** of conducting diagnosis.

In Chapter 7, we made the point that a problem-centric preference for diagnosing is largely based on a conscious effort to identify symptoms and causes.

In Chapter 8, we shifted the emphasis from symptoms and causes to a more communicative mode of diagnosing largely inspired by dialogue and appreciative inquiry.

**In this chapter** we extend our knowledge of 7 and 8 by looking at intervention and how to go about deciding on level of intervention to be pursued.

- We will describe Blake and Mouton's modes of intervention and that of Harrison's notion of 'depth'.
- We will also describe how intervention could also be related to the notion of **discourse**, namely how intervention could be approached as a construction of what is spoken or written.

## Recap

- In diagnosis, we focus on the **what**, **where** and **why**.
- In intervention, we focus on the **how** and **when**.

- We start taking the very first step by intervening in the presenting situation/s.

*Examples:*

- **How** do we deal with the problem?
- **When** can we best tackle this problem?

## Defining the act of intervention

Having diagnosed, we intervene in an attempt to moderate the situation at hand.

... here are some examples of an intervention ...

- Taking action to reverse a decline in productivity.
- Responding to a decline in demand.
- Restructuring
- Implementing TQM

Argyris (1970: 15) notes: 'To intervene is to come between or among persons, groups.'

Intervention involves a facilitator, a change agent, or a change team.

Argyris (1970: 15–16) sees facilitation process based on exchange of information, collaboration and commitment.



Central to our discussion of intervention is the question of how deeply we need to intervene as change agents.

Later on we will be introducing the notion of 'depth of intervention' exhibited through the metaphor of a swimming pool.

But then having to intervene is associated with the notion of change in attitudes.

We might be able to get a person to change their behaviour in a top-down approach without having to modify or alter their attitudinal dispositions. However, action demanded is more likely to be short-lived.

*What is an attitude?*

An attitude' is a relational term about things like cognitions and affects, or feelings (likes and dislikes).

- Attitudes are also organized through conversational settings involving the exchange of experiences and socialization.
- Attitudes are reinforced through conversations with others (Gergen, 2008).

Could it be that attitudes are at the deeper end?  
*Let's discuss . . .*

Although attitudes are located at the covert (hidden) level, they are often talked about by employees.

Central to the discussion of attitudes is the question of how deeply we need to intervene as change agents.

Now, let's look at the notion of the organization using the metaphor of an *iceberg*

**Overt:** These are the visible aspects, including structures, designs, goals, roles, procedures, performance measures and rewards

**Covert (hidden):** These are the hidden aspects, including attitudes, cultures, values, affects, satisfaction, power, interpersonal relationships and group sentiments

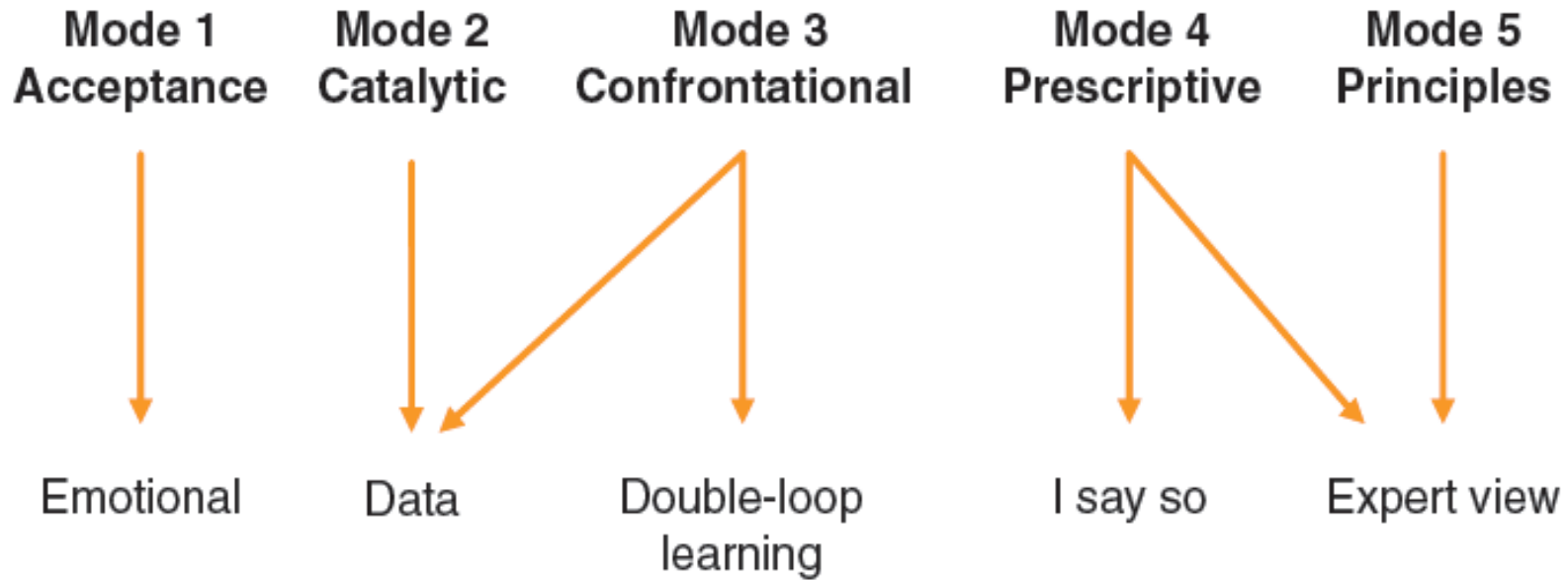
## Activity

Reflect on how the analogy of an iceberg can be applied to managing change at more than one level.

*Hint:* The notion of the 'iceberg' can be used to gain an understanding of the three levels of

analysis. For example, we can use the notion of the iceberg to implicate covert notions associated with attitudes and personality preferences, as well as change at the level of the team and the organization.

# Modes of Intervention

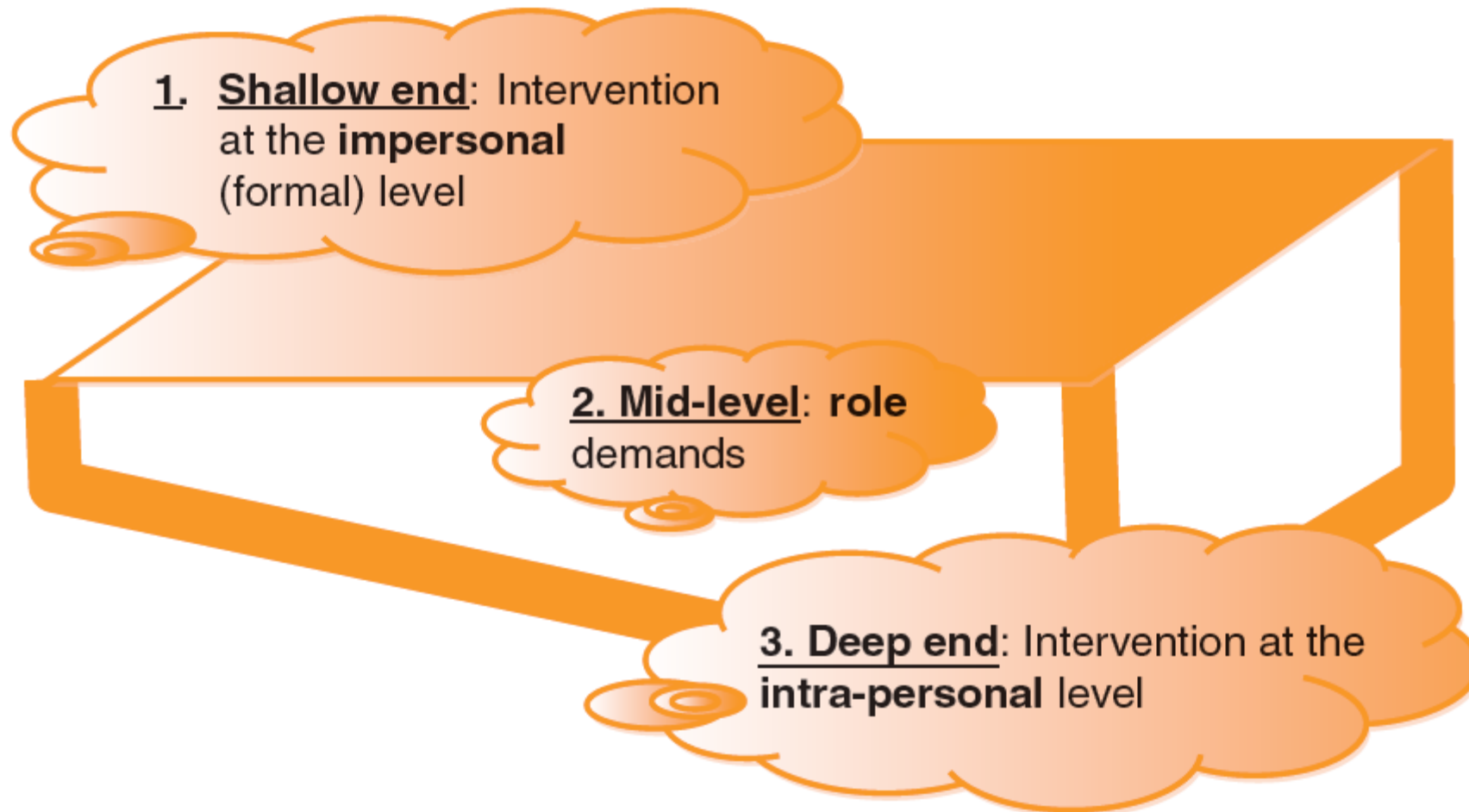


*Let's look into the following proposition:*

Intervening at the behavioural level falls at the shallow end, while changing attitudes requires intervention at a much deeper level.

**Let's discuss ...**





## Harrison's two golden rules

Golden rule no.1: Intervene at a level no deeper than required to produce enduring solutions to the problem at hand.

Golden rule no. 2: Intervene at a level no deeper than that at which the energy and resources of the client can be committed to problem-solving and change.

Can intervention be looked at as discourse?

*Let's discuss . . .*

Intervention involves appreciating the balance between enquiry and promoting involvement of others.

- Intervention is also related to communication.
- After all, **intervention is discourse**. It has to involve a conversation of some sort.

One way to approach intervention would be to construe it as **monologic** discourse. This is a form of discourse in which engagement becomes less important and is also *viewed* as less important.

Hence, employees do not get involved ... they rarely do so in some genuine way.

The other way would be to approach intervention as a polyphonic (multivoiced) process of perpetual change achieved through involvement of people at more than one level.

Intervention, in the words of Bakhtin (1984: 110), is ‘**born between people**’.

**Employees would need to be encouraged to get involved ...**

**Thank you**