# Haridimos Tsoukas: Understanding Organizational Change via Philosophy and Complexity

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**Abstract**

Haridimos ("Hari") Tsoukas is a Greek organizational theorist whose work has been influential in introducing and popularizing a holistic, process-based conception of organizational change. Traditional accounts of change assume that entities (including organizations) are by nature static and only undergo change after external force is applied. In contrast, Tsoukas maintains that change is ever-present in the social world and that change itself is the intrinsic basis for organizing. As such for Tsoukas, organizations are not static entities but ongoing processes of organizing, embedded within social nexuses of practices and discourses, which are constantly mutating. He identifies two main sources of organizational change: (i) the world being an open-system and (ii) the reflexive agent. The assumptions and conclusions underlying his work have been strongly influenced by interpretative, phenomenological, and process philosophy, as well as complexity theory. To acquaint the reader with his ideas and work, the chapter is structured as follows: first it will describe Tsoukas' background, secondly it will summarize his key contributions to understanding organizational change, and thirdly it will discuss new insights from his work and it will conclude with his work's legacies and unfinished business.

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## Introduction

Heraclitus famously remarked that "everything changes and nothing abides." This dictum may be argued to hold for both the physical and social strata of our world (see Prigogine 1992). On a physical level, change is evident, for instance, in the different geological layers of our planet. Each layer took millennia to form and signifies vastly different environmental circumstances overtime. On a social level, constant change is even more rapid. This is testified by both the constant mutation of different social institutions over the course of human history (e.g., tribalism, democracy, feudalism, communism, and capitalism) and by the endogenously created instability of each social institution (e.g., ever-changing financial and political circumstances in twentieth-century Capitalism) (e.g., see Cunha and Tsoukas 2015). On a micro-social level, that of the individual, change is apparent in the life history of each person which essentially is influenced by the evolving circumstances that exist during one's time. Ongoing change is something that Professor Haridimos Tsoukas came to recognize through his research and the trajectory of his own life. This may be illustrated by how his interest in exploring, thinking, and writing about organizational change had emerged through his life experiences.

## Influences and Motivations: The Process of Becoming

Haridimos Tsoukas was born in 1961 in the small mountainous town of Karpenisi, in central Greece. He is often simply referred to as Hari, which is the Greek short form of the name Haridimos. He was the eldest child among three kids. His father worked as a shop keeper and his mother as a dressmaker. He grew up in a loving family, whose motto was "education, education, education." Family narratives of poverty, the Nazi occupation of Greece, the Greek civil war (1945–1949), and the persecution of left-leaning citizens after the end of the civil war (and the victory of the Right) shaped his upbringing. When the military dictatorship in Greece collapsed and democracy returned in 1974, Hari was in his early adolescence (13 years old).

He spent his late adolescent and early student years in an intensely politicized atmosphere, and as he admits, it has been impossible for him to shake off his long-held interest in politics and current affairs. As a student, he was involved in the left only to realize soon that his love of independent, open-ended thinking could not find a hospitable habitat in closed ideologies and intellectually unsophisticated political parties of the left. In the course of time, he came to describe himself as a progressive or communitarian liberal in the manner of Philip Selznick (2002). Civic engagement has always been important to him. As an intellectual, he always thought it important to contribute to public dialogue through his writing of opinion articles in Greek newspapers, a practice he begun even from his early student days through publishing a local newspaper in his home town.

Hari was originally educated as an electrical and industrial engineer. During the early-to-mid-1980s, he studied engineering on both an undergraduate (Ptychion) and postgraduate level (M.Sc.), at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece) and the Cranfield University (United Kingdom), respectively. As he admits he was an "unhappy engineer by discipline" during the period of his undergraduate studies, and between 1985 and 1990, he grasped the opportunity to defect to the social sciences by undertaking a Ph.D. in organizational sociology at the Manchester Business School. While there, he received the Tom Lupton Doctoral Research Scholarship. During this time, he was supervised by the late Professor Tom Lupton, who subsequently retired, and his supervision was undertaken by Dr. Alan Thomas. His doctoral thesis was a piece of organizational sociology – "Explaining work organization: A realist approach (Tsoukas 1989a)" – involving the study of two plants, a chemical plant in northern Greece and another in northern England. Since his undergraduate days, he was strongly interested in the theory of knowledge, which later intensified during his doctoral research. The course on epistemology, on the first year of the Ph.D. program at the Manchester Business School run by Professor Richard Whitley, influenced him deeply. His concern with philosophy of science was manifested in the subtitled of his doctoral thesis ("A realist approach") – his research was explicitly based on a realist epistemology (Bhaskar, Harre), through which he attempted to explain the differences in the work organization of the two plants.

Another important influence during his doctoral years was the late Professor Stafford Beer – one of the leading post-World War II cyberneticians (Beer 1981). As he himself acknowledges, Hari took from Professor Beer a keen interest in systems, complexity, and cybernetics, which he has retained to the present day. Other intellectual influences were anthropologist Gregory Bateson (1979) and the philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis (2005). As Hari notes, from Bateson he learned to appreciate communication, metaphor, and connectedness, while he owes to Castoriadis his appreciation of indeterminacy and creative praxis. Looking back at his own intellectual development, he sees a decisive shift from rationalistic modes of thinking toward a greater appreciation of language, interpretation, and process. His encounter with the work of the late Professor John Shotter made him discover the eye-opening philosophies of Wittgenstein and Bakhtin while developing later an acute interest in phenomenology, existentialism, and Aristotelian philosophy. His strong interest in philosophy is evident throughout his work. Perhaps the best

description of his own intellectual making is provided by him as follows (slightly paraphrased, see http://www.htsoukas.com): "I am not a philosopher but can't help but see everything from a philosophical point of view. I am not a complexity scientist but can't help but approach everything in terms of Gregory Bateson's memorable phrase "the pattern that connects." And I am not a politician but, as an engaged citizen, can't help but be passionate about the affairs of the 'polis'."

Between 1988 and 1990, he became an associate fellow of management studies at the University of Manchester. From 1990 until 1995, he was appointed as a lecturer in organizational behavior at the University of Warwick. Following 1995, he became an associate professor of organization and management at the University of Cyprus (1995–1998) and at the ALBA Graduate School (1999–2000). He was offered his first professorship at the University of Essex (1998–2000), which was followed by professorships at ALBA (2001–2003) and the University of Strathclyde (2000–2003). Since the early 2000s, thanks to his growing reputation and dedication to his profession, he was appointed as a scientific advisor to the Association of Chief Executive Officers in Greece and as a book series editor for the series "Management" by Kastaniotis Publishers in Greece (since 2003) and as series coeditor for "Perspectives on Process Organization Studies" by Oxford University Press (since 2010). Between the years 2003 and 2008, Hari became the editor in chief of the highly regarded journal *Organization Studies*. In conjunction with the above, Hari was promoted to George D. Mavros Research Professor of Organization and Management at ALBA (2003–2009). Throughout his career, Hari remained a strong believer in being an active citizen. As such, he regularly comments on Greek and Cypriot politics in major national media (i.e., currently "To Vima"; previously "Kathimerini," "EconomikosTachidromos") and his personal blog Articulate Howl (www.htsoukas.blogspot.co.uk – where he writes in Greek) (see Tsoukas 2015b). In 2015, to stay faithful to his beliefs on being an active citizen, he unsuccessfully ran for the Greek Parliament with a newly created social-democratic party.

As can be seen from the above, Hari has grown into becoming a highly esteemed member of the field of organizational and management studies. In 2009, his fascination with the notion of constant change led him to co-found (with Ann Langley) the annual International Process Symposium to which he has been a co-convener ever since. Currently he holds the positions of the Columbia Ship Management Professor of Strategic Management at the University of Cyprus (since 2010) and the Distinguished Research Environment Professor of Organizational Studies at the University of Warwick (since 2003). While holding these positions, apart from serving as the Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Management of the University of Cyprus (2012–2016), he received numerous awards for his teaching and research. Specifically, for the last 11 years Hari, has consistently received the Best MBA Teacher Award from Warwick Business School. Additionally, in 2014, he was awarded a higher doctorate (D.Sc.) from the University of Warwick in recognition of his lifetime contribution to his field of scholarship. Two years later, he was made the 18th EGOS Honorary Member and awarded the Joanne Martin Trailblazer

Award from the Academy of Management to recognize his work's contribution to organization and management theory, especially process thinking. During the same year, he was awarded the Cypriot Research Award from the Cypriot Research Promotion Foundation, in acknowledgment of conducting high-quality research in the Republic of Cyprus.

## Key Contributions: Weaving Together Philosophy and Management

The aim of this section is twofold: firstly, I attempt to unpack the concepts that Hari uses to account for organizational change by referring to his research and influences; and secondly I seek to exemplify how his theoretical work enables a holistic understanding of organizational change. Indeed, the assumption that change is both perpetual and inherent in the social stratum is one of the most central aspects of Hari's research on organizational change. This is because this notion seems to underlie all the four pillars he relies on to account for change in organizations, which he and Robert Chia have termed as "organizational becoming" (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). The four pillars Hari builds on are (i) process, (ii) discourse, (iii) performativity, and (iv) the socially embedded self-reflexive individual. Despite referring to these concepts separately, it should be kept in mind that Hari's key contributions to understanding organizational change lay in their creative synthesis, which I seek to demonstrate below.

### Process

Tsoukas (2012, p. 70) takes the ontological position that social phenomena (e.g., organizations) are not predetermined entities that await discovery via the utilization of quasi-Newtonian reasoning (see also Weick 1979). On the contrary, social phenomena are assumed to be the emerging interweavement of actions of sentient agents that have both intended and unintended consequences (Cunha and Tsoukas 2015, p. 229; Tsoukas and Chia 2011). He argues that to understand social phenomena in-depth (including organizational change), one must conduct detailed studies of the flow of activities in situated and temporal contexts (Langley et al. 2013; Tsoukas 1989b, 2009b, 2012, 2016b). Of course, the lack of determinacy in social interaction does not imply that the latter occurs randomly (i.e., without order/logic) (Tsoukas 2005b, p. 73). This is due to the fact that any interaction is inherently a part of both a broader social context as well as a local situation (Tsoukas 1998a, b). What this suggests is that although agents do not automatically execute a set of deterministic rules imposed on them by a social structure (Garud et al. 2015), these interactions are nevertheless regulated by tacitly attending from shared social expectations and understandings to the exigencies of each situation at hand (Dionysiou and Tsoukas

2013; Tsoukas 1996, 1998a, 2011). This understanding leaves open the possibility that new interactions may give rise to creative adaptation of what is socially expected, and this in turn may create new possibilities for future action which prior to an occurrence was unthinkable (Tsoukas and Chia 2002).

Hence, before Hari considers organizations, he sees that human action is essentially an ever-mutating flux of interaction (Tsoukas 1998b). Based on this, it is evident that he does not prioritize stability, to be able to conceptualize change (Tsoukas and Dooley 2011). In other words, he does not see change as a "fait accompli," but as a phenomenon that is always present. As such, he sees organizations as "secondary accomplishments" (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, p. 570). In Tsoukas and Chia (2002, p. 570) words: "Change must not be thought of as a property of organization. Rather, organization must be understood as an emergent property of change. Change is ontologically prior to organization." Put simply, change is the very condition for the existence of organizations – organization at large stabilizes human interaction. Nevertheless, despite their differences in ontological order, change and organizations are both conceived to share a similar nature: they are unfolding *processes* in which mutation over time is a given (Tsoukas 1998b).

## Discourse

In their present form, organizations exist to impose order and hence direct the incessant flux of human interaction toward certain ends. They do so by imposing socially instituted rules and meanings on their members (Castoriadis 2005; Tsoukas 1998b; Tsoukas and Hatch 2001). By drawing on Weick (1979), it is asserted that organizations offer their members "a set of [generic] cognitive categories," which are meant to orient them in unfolding situations (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, p. 571). For example, the category "patient" is used in medical practices to signify that a person under this generalization requires treatment (Tsoukas 2016b, p. 149). Sharing categories is achieved by exposing organizational members to a specific way of talking about things – a discourse (Rorty 1989, p. 6; Taylor 1985b, p. 23; Tsoukas and Hatch 2001, p. 239). Discourse is given to members in narrative form (organized in stories) (see Bruner 1991). Thanks to this form, they are enabled to perceive what is salient in situations (Tsoukas 1998a). Each discourse highlights a specific aspect of the world that is tied to what is of importance to the community that uses it and, as such, signifies specific states of affairs and appropriate activity (Tsoukas 1998c, 2005a). This is because each discourse is centered around an imagery (see Shotter and Tsoukas 2011). For example, the development of chaos theory signifies that the until now dominant Newtonian imagery which had assumed that the cosmos is ordered and stable is simply one way of examining and thinking about it (see Tsoukas 1998b). The legitimation of the chaotic discourse essentially allows scientists to seek to understand the cosmos in ways unthinkable in the Newtonian conception. The reason is that the underlying imagery of the cosmos in chaos theory is one of unstable, dynamic, nonlinear behavior which is radically different from the Newtonian.

## Performativity

Over time, agents take the organizational discourse and the way it presents the world (imagery), for granted, and engage in a patterned (i.e., organized) typology of actions. The performances that fall under a pattern of action for the sake of accomplishing an organizational goal are more commonly referred to as routines (Dionysiou and Tsoukas 2013; Weick 1979). But routines, like discourse, are seen at best only as "emergent accomplishments" (Feldman 2000). This is because they both have an element of stability and change. Both are open to modification, adaption, or even erosion (Tsoukas 2005a, p. 101). It should be noted, however, that language (which includes cognitive categories) and performance (i.e., practice/activity) are mutually constituted – if one changes so does the other (Tsoukas 2005a, p. 99).

The change of cognitive categories and routines can be explained by their contact with the world (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). In the world (which includes the organization) it is impossible to have definitional closure, because it is an open system (Prigogine 1992; Tsoukas 2016a). The world is an open system because events (especially in the social stratum) do not always follow a predetermined pattern – they are subject to unpredictable variation (Tsoukas 1989b, 1998b, 2013). In Tsoukas' (2016b, p. 145) words: "first-time events are not exception but the rule in human life." New events present members with new sets of circumstances. The uniqueness of the circumstances always has an element which has neither been articulated nor dealt with before (see Shotter 2011; Shotter and Tsoukas 2011). Hence, to express and deal with the new features of situations, organizational members must create new distinctions (Tsoukas 2009a, p. 942). To do so, they draw and apply existing cognitive categories and routines in new ways (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). If the new ways of expression and behaving are taken up by a number of people in the organization – this leads to new knowledge and organizational change (Tsoukas 2005a, p. 99, 2009a). Therefore, the constant performance of improvisation is required for the function and maintenance of the organization. This renders the organization as a process that is perpetually becoming something that it previously was not (Tsoukas and Chia 2011, p. 9; Weick 1993).

To illustrate the above, consider the ever-changing moving-in routine of the housing department of a U.S. university studied by Feldman (2000) and later discussed by Tsoukas and Chia (2002). Initially, the department specified that students could move into the university's halls of residence during three specific days at the beginning of the academic year. This routine resulted in angering the students and their parents, because it caused long queues and traffic jams. Their complaints triggered the department to change its routine in the following semesters. Specifically, an administrator was appointed to liaise with the local police department to manage traffic during those days. In parallel to this measure, new rules were instituted for the moving-in days. Cars stopping to unload in front of the halls were restricted to do so for just half an hour, and other specific parking spaces were allotted for the moving-in days. Change did not stop there. During a later year, the university's team was scheduled to play during the first move-in day. Because this caused serious complications to the housing department's process, further refinements were made to the department's routines. They decided to

also liaise with the sports department prior to those moving-in days to ensure that they do not have a similar clash in the future.

## Reflexive Agent

Of course, improvisation and thus change, cannot happen automatically. Sentient, knowledgeable individuals are required for organizations to perform effectively and achieve change in the light of the uncertainty and singularity of new circumstances (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2011, p. 342; Shotter and Tsoukas 2014b; Tsoukas 1996). According to Yanow and Tsoukas (2009), by relying on social/organizational significations, people are habituated to behave in certain ways (see also Tsoukas 2015a, p. 63). The habituation implies that when dealing with routine situations, people do so nonreflexively (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2011). Despite their nonreflexivity, their behavior always draws on collectively established significations of their social context (Shotter and Tsoukas 2014b, pp. 383–385; Tsoukas 1996). For example, when helping a customer with a common phone issue, an experienced employee is solicited by the situation to respond in a polite and helpful manner (as befits speaking to a customer) without having to think about it (Tsoukas and Vladimirou 2001). But, in unexpected situations, performances which under normal instances are fluid – break down.

Performance breaks down because the employee is likely to be "reflecting on" how to best deal with the unfamiliarity of the situation (Sandberg and Tsoukas 2011, pp. 344–346). But even in non-typical situations where the person is called upon to improvise, like in routine behavior, she/he necessarily draws on socially "established distinctions and standards of excellence" (Tsoukas 2015a; Yanow and Tsoukas 2009, p. 1345). The magnitude of a breakdown is related to how severe the unexpected situation is, and this in turn relates to the modification of the routines/categories required (Tsoukas 2016b; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). If the situation is only minimally different to a typical situation, then the employee is likely to only momentarily "reflect in action" and marginally adapt the normal procedure to deal with it. However, when the breakdown is a major deviation from typical situations, the employee is likely to have to "reflect on action" so as to find a new and appropriate ways to deal with the situation (Yanow and Tsoukas 2009). Consequently, one may see instituting a combination of a certain discourse, and a set of appropriate behaviors is not entirely pointless due to the open-endedness of the world (see Tsoukas and Dooley 2011). They both serve as the basis for their "imaginative extension" in ways that serve the organizational cause (Tsoukas and Chia 2002).

However, it should be noted that change is not only the result of organizational members encountering non-typical and unexpected situations (Tsoukas and Dooley 2011). People are inherently generators of organizational change (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). This is because agents are not simply puppets for the organization to achieve

its goals. As explicated above, they are reflexive and, in addition, are emotional beings that have corporeality (Tsoukas 2005b, p. 380). Reflexivity is tied to narrative thinking, and this implies that all narratives have a narrator (Tsoukas 1998a; Tsoukas and Hatch 2001, p. 248). Due to their social nature, humans are reflexive narrators. Consequently, they can replicate what they do as agents in the form of stories. But far from being slaves to their perceptions and existing narratives, they can narratively reorganize what they perceive in ways that new possibilities for action are illuminated (MacIntyre 2007; Tsoukas and Hatch 2001). Therefore, due to having their own interests and views about the workplace, they themselves may use new narrative forms which in turn may serve as catalysts for change. In other words, they can exercise their ability to self-reflect (Yanow and Tsoukas 2009), so as to adapt their behavior by revising previously held beliefs in the light of new experiences (Tsoukas and Chia 2002).

An excellent example of the role of sentient individuals as a source of organizational change is the case of Rebecca Olson analyzed by Shotter and Tsoukas (2014a). Olson was appointed as the new CEO at a hospital in the United States. Shortly after her appointment, she realizes that along with the hospital's financial problems, she had to deal with a case of sexual harassment that had been ignored by her predecessor. The reason the case was ignored, despite the existence of an official process for dealing with such complaints was that the harasser was a member of a powerful family which could potentially cause problems to any CEO in the specific hospital. On top of that, it was not only one person that complained about the harasser but several over a sequence of years. Notice that like her predecessor, she could have opted to ignore the case and just focus on the financial aspect so as not to jeopardize her job. However, one of the victims, like Rebecca, had a physical disability. This spontaneously made her feel empathy for the victim. The "blend [of] judgment [disapproval] and feelings [disgust]" about the situation moved Rebecca to act against the harasser (Shotter and Tsoukas 2014a, p. 233). Unlike other similar cases she had dealt with in her previous work experience, the uniqueness of the circumstances predisposed her to approach this situation cautiously. For instance, she did not fire the person on the spot or take him to a tribunal. Due to the harasser's influence, she spent months deliberating and talking with people across the hospital. With this, over time she managed to acquire enough leverage to force the harasser to resign.

One can see that the actions of two single individuals and the inaction of several others effected change on the specific organization. In the case of the harasser, his influence and the inaction of other members allowed him to enact sexual harassment – undisturbed – in the organization for several years. This of course, changed the hospital's (not to mention his victims') morale and what behaviors were perceived as tolerable. However, with the intervention of the new CEO, she manages to change the status quo of the organization and reiterate that such behavior is unacceptable. Notice that to impose this change, she was not guided by the indifferent "processing" of hospital regulations (Taylor 1993). The process involved the unfolding of

embodied emotions, reflection, and judgement. Her actions were the result of attending from what she considered to be socially accepted to how that type of behavior made her feel and think and consequently weave her narrative (Shotter and Tsoukas 2014a, p. 228).

In summary, by applying Hari's conceptual framework, it is noticeable that organizational change is not related to a particular aspect of an organization – but to the organization as a whole. The social realm is seen as an ever-evolving flux of human interaction that mutates on the basis of the nonlinear evolution of its institutions. Organizations are created to order the flux toward achieving a certain goal. Although, organizations are created to impose order, they are not stable entities. On the contrary, they are bundles of processes of organizing that are gradually differentiating their language (e.g., customer satisfaction, sales figures) and routines (e.g., safety, disciplinary procedures). Two reasons are identified as the main drivers of change. The first is the open-endedness of the world, which gives rise to unpredictable variation. Due to this, organizations are constantly called upon to deal with aspects of situations they have not dealt with before. As such, to deal with the uniqueness of each situation, they must "generate singularities" – tweak their practices and create new terminology to categorize arising peculiarities (Tsoukas 2016b, p. 246). The second is related to the organization's members. Specifically, as self-reflexive beings that experience the world emotionally via their bodies, they are seen to have their own perspective on how the organization "ought" to be. Therefore, by experiencing new situations, these may cause them to reflect on their beliefs. By doing so they may find that they would like the organization to be otherwise narratively rearrange events and thus take action that aims to change the organization (e.g., creation of new routines, organization of strikes, leadership initiatives). However, for any of the two discussed reasons to effect change, potential variations in routines or discourse must be taken up by a significant number of members of an organization.

## New Insights: Beyond Determinacy and Rationalism

The new insights that can be derived from Hari's work on organizational change stem from the fact that it affords us to see this phenomenon in a completely new light. His work introduces a postmodern conception of the world (see Toulmin 1992, 2001), which emphasizes that "change is a fundamental ontological category of lived experience and that organization is an attempt to order and stabilize the intrinsic flux of human action" (Tsoukas 2005a, p. 101). Although, this view may be more accepted in the present, it was not common in the management literature when Hari started working with it in the 1990s. The vast majority of the management literature approached social phenomena (including organizational change) from the Cartesian-cum-Newtonian ontological perspective of static entities causally impacting each other (Shotter and Tsoukas 2011, p. 334). This perspective has been dominant for a very long time – its lineage can be traced as far back as Plato

and Aristotle (see Tsoukas 1998b). In addition to the aforementioned perspective's assumption of "stasis" (being static), the literature on organizational change and strategy approached both from a rationalist perspective where they were portrayed as the result of premeditated planning (see Tsoukas and Chia 2011, pp. 8–9). The two most popular approaches that have relied heavily on rationalism and the ontology of determinacy to conceptualize organizational change are the behaviorist and cognitivist (Shotter and Tsoukas 2011, p. 334; Tsoukas 2005a). To understand how Hari's work spurred new developments in theory and research on organizational change, this section is structured as follows: I shall first briefly summarize how organizational change had been researched by the behaviorist and cognitive approaches prior to the popularization of Hari's work, and then I will aim to show how later research has incorporated Hari's insights.

One of the earliest and most prominent advocates of the behaviorist approach of organizational change is Kurt Lewin. This approach's underlying assumptions suggest that change is "episodic" and "other-directional" and that what is changed are objects with specific structures which can be calculatingly altered (Tsoukas 2005a, pp. 96–97). In particular, change is suggested to be essentially a sequence of movement between distinct states, e.g., moving from A to B and then to C (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, 2011, p. 9). Entities, such as organizations, are portrayed to be static by nature. Therefore, in this approach what is examined are the states but not the change that occurs between them (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). To effect change, a change agent (usually the management) must force a change on the organization by altering its members' behavior. The change agent can do so by issuing edicts that highlight a desired end which can be attained by the members behaving in a certain manner. To enforce edicts, change agents must rely on their hierarchical authority to reward or punish members. With the above rationale, it is obvious that the agents of change are seen as external forces that force organizations to change after considerable calculation on how to do so (Tsoukas 2005a).

Similarly, the cognitivist approach holds approximately the same assumptions about change as the behaviorist approach. However, the key difference between the two approaches lies with the fact that cognitivists focus on *why* people behave in certain ways (Tsoukas 2005a, p. 97). Behavior for them is a secondary phenomenon that depends on the meaning people have about something (see Healey et al. 2015). Meaning is equated with information processing. The latter is portrayed to mediate what a person perceives and how she/he responds to situations (for an extensive review, see Hodgkinson and Healey 2008). Information processing is seen to depend on a person's schemata of the external world (also referred to as representations). The latter are argued to be a form of stored knowledge which structures a person's perception of the world and the meaning it has for them. So, to enact organizational change, one must change the driver of behavior – the schemata. Merely applying a "stimulus-response" technique via the reinforcement or discouragement of behavior by rewarding or punishing people is highlighted to be inadequate (see Eden 1992, p. 261). Per the cognitivists, one must first understand individuals' schemata and

then attempt to change them to successfully implement organizational change. Schemata are seen as measurable by using a technique referred to as cognitive mapping (see Pyrko et al. 2016). By doing so one can see the staff's beliefs and goals. Consequently, organizational change is again seen only as a matter of planning, applied in a series of steps by an external change agent (Eden and Ackermann 1998). Firstly measure the staff's schemata, secondly facilitate them to reflect and agree on "an aggregated map, and thirdly agree on a course of action for intervention" (Tsoukas 2005a, p. 97).

It is now easy to see the contrast of assumptions employed by the determinist-cum-rationalist perspective and Hari's as they are diametrically opposite. Whereas the first perspective holds that change is effected episodically on objects with determined structures (e.g., staff, behavior) by meticulous planning from external agents, the latter maintains that change is continuous and occurs intentionally and non-intentionally from within ever-mutating processes of organizing which rely on discursive distinctions that legitimize certain practices (Tsoukas and Chia 2002). These assumptions and the use of a process-cum-phenomenological language have opened up new avenues of researching organizational change by legitimizing the study of organizational discourses and practices as catalysts of change. For example, the *Journal of Organizational Change* had a special issue on how discourse is related to change in organizations, where Hari was called to write the afterword on how language matters in organizational change (Tsoukas 2005a). In this special issue, studies showed how discourse relates to organizational change and how a change of organizational routines relates to changes in discourse (e.g., see Anderson 2005; Tietze 2005). Similarly a further series of studies focusing on organizational change have further highlighted the role of marginal unplanned mutations in discourse, resources, and practices having cited Hari's work, ideas, and terminology (e.g., see Chiles et al. 2004; Feldman 2004; Reay et al. 2006; Weick et al. 2005).

## Legacies and Unfinished Business: Different Language, Different World

Wittgenstein aptly remarked that "a picture held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably" (Wittgenstein 1986, para. 115). In the case of organizational change and organization studies, the picture of determinate entities with static natures has long held us captive (Tsoukas 2005a; Tsoukas and Chia 2002). This worldview paints a world of static objects and subjects that are locked together in quasi-causal relationships (Shotter and Tsoukas 2011). By uncritically adopting it, this perspective masks that the world is constantly subject to change and the process cannot be reduced to points on spatiotemporal lines. It masks what happens between the points and that change is not only effected from external forces (Tsoukas and Chia 2002, 2011). It masks that meaning is conceivable only from attending from the background of the vast nexuses of social meaning (Tsoukas 2005b, Chap. 16). It masks

that change occurs from within the organization and that even Machiavellian change agents themselves are subject to change (Tsoukas 2005a).

The above is easily grasped if one realizes that no one, not even scheming change agents, possess what Thomas Nagel (1986) refers to as "the view from nowhere" – an objective, a-contextual, and a-temporal vantage point from which to peruse organizations and the world (Tsoukas 1997). Change agents and organizations themselves are immersed in social practices and imageries that orient them toward pursuing certain goals (Castoriadis 2005; Tsoukas 1998b). This is easily demonstrated by asking ourselves the question: toward what end is change consciously sought after by management of organizations that partake in modern capitalism? The answer is simple. It seeks to make the organization more efficient for it to attain the goal of infinite growth by infinitely reducing costs via the application of certain technological means (not necessarily material). If one accepts that societies institute certain goals which they take for granted and uncritically paint in positive colors (e.g., infinite growth and efficiency in modernity, God in the middle ages), then the notion of impartiality of change agents and organizations is a modern myth (Castoriadis 2005; Tsoukas 1997). A myth that was conceptualized in the Renaissance with Nicolai Copernicus's discoveries, the inception of Newtonian physics, and then popularized in the humanities by Descartes, Spinoza, and co; a myth which the Western world has enthusiastically strived to fulfil ever since. This myth's sphere of influence reached its climax in the first half of the twentieth century (e.g., the Vienna Circle, behaviorism, cognitivism) (MacIntyre 2007; Taylor 1985a; Toulmin 1992, 2001; Tsoukas 2011). But especially in the second half of that century, this view's accepted legitimacy had started to wane with the popularization of quantum physics, chaos theory, phenomenology, and re-engaging with pre-Socratic philosophers (Toulmin 2001; Tsoukas 1998b).

Following the above, the legacy of Haridimos Tsoukas lies with the fact that he has assisted in the making of a new worldview from which to examine organizational change. He has done so by helping scholars researching organizational change (and organization studies in general) to become familiarized with a new language early as the end of the 1980s (e.g., see Chiles et al. 2004; Feldman 2004; Garud et al. 2015; Reay et al. 2006; Weick et al. 2005). The language of complexity, phenomenology, and process philosophy are evident throughout most of his work (Tsoukas 1998b, 2016a; Tsoukas and Dooley 2011). In a recent keynote speech, he identified and urged researchers to import more vocabulary from the aforementioned fields in order to further investigate organizational change (Tsoukas 2015c). Specifically, these fields utilize an alternative language to describe emerging change, but process philosophy, in particular, has a unique way of signifying how temporality is linked to change (Garud et al. 2015, pp. 8–10). In his keynote address, Hari argued that especially the work of Herni Bergson can help us comprehend organizational change differently. As he noted:

> . . .for Bergson and his interpreters. . .in the interest of action, attention is necessarily focused on the present, thus reducing the intensity of the whole past to a spatialized (extensive)

conception of time. Insofar as we are typically interested in what we can do in the present, we assume that such a reduction is lasting, forgetting that the solidity of the actual is only apparent. However, the whole past does not go away. On the contrary, it may be selectively evoked in reconstructing present identity.

How does this help us better understand organizational change? As argued by Hari, it allows us to identify that organizational change is not only the result of deliberate managerial initiatives but also of a reality that is "continuous, indivisible, and qualitatively diverse," which unintentionally forges and reforges personal and organizational identities.

Hari identifies two promising avenues for future research on organizational change: firstly, he argues that we need to know more about how the past (societal, organizational, personal) influences how change is brought about by predisposing change agents and organizations to seek the attainment of certain goals. Secondly, and more importantly for Hari, new research should seek to adopt a language such as that used by Henri Bergson, William James, and Alfred North Whitehead (Tsoukas 2015c). This is because he argues that doing so would allow us to look beyond the ontology of static objects as implied in the language used to develop the until recently dominant stage-based models used that seek to account for organizational change. He is especially insistent on using a different vocabulary to think about phenomena because he takes seriously what Wittgenstein said over half a century ago: "the limits of my language mean the limits of my world" (Wittgenstein 2010, p. 74). Following numerous conversations with him, it is obvious to me that he is a fervent believer in the notion that the role of researchers in the social sciences is to push the boundaries of language to draw new distinctions that will allow us to perceive further nuances in our world or even to transform our view.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, Hari has issued a call to arms – he is calling us to examine change and organizing from an entirely different perspective. By following the footsteps of his beloved philosophers – Cornelius Castoriadis, Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre, Richard Rorty, and Stephen Toulmin to name just a few – he has left us with a choice: we can follow suit and strive to cast off the shackles of the myths of modernity and take aim at creating new ways of perceiving the world (Tsoukas 1997, 1998b). Alternatively, we can continue to uncritically accept the mythology already in place in fear of anything different. Indeed, the new, the different – like the old can also prove to be a tyranny. Therefore, it should be stressed that Hari does not advocate blindly embracing different perspectives for the sake of them being different or new. Based on his political articles published in Greek media, he is acutely aware that dogmatism can only lead to sustaining old or creating new tyrannies of myths (see Tsoukas 2015b). By being lucky enough to have been Hari's student, I am certain that if he had to leave you with some remarks on how to further research

organizational change or any other phenomenon, it would be to stay curious, be open-minded, and never stop being (self) critical.

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