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Foreword

Anne Kloosterboer brought a scrapbook to our first meeting in the centre of Amsterdam.

The workers had already descended from their ivory office towers as it was Friday – and a warm springtime afternoon. Colleagues and friends fanned out across the terraces of Prince Bernhard Square, to toast the coming weekend with the traditional *vrijmibo* (Friday afternoon drinks). We stuck to the *bitterballen*.

Anne navigated her way among them and claimed an empty table for us outside Restaurant Dauphine, conveniently situated beside the entrance to our newspaper, *Het Financieele Dagblad*.

Anne had emailed our editor-in-chief. She wanted to write for the newspaper, and had been inspired by a series of short stories by Harry Starren. Harry wrote an aphorism on leadership every week: two short passages that read like poetry or a magic spell, depending on one's perspective. These aphorisms emerged from the deepest undercurrents of Harry's brain – a place where pipe-smoking caterpillars and white rabbits wearing watches were chasing each other. Yet they were a beacon of hope for the toiling middle manager. Harry's tales had the power to counterbalance the sense of doom every morning.

Anne wanted something similar, she wrote, although her stories had to be about leading change.

"Dear Mr Kloosterboer," I wrote back. "Please come by to discuss!" And there it was again, I reflected later, another unconscious prejudice to note and discard.

Anne placed a "decision tree" on the table on Dauphine's terrace. This tool, she said, would enable you to see at a single glance what was troubling you in your change journey and which solution would solve it. For a while, I attempted to translate this diagram into two punchy paragraphs, but however long I looked at it, I kept seeing what looked like a tax return form.

Almost apologetically, Anne pulled a scrapbook from her bag. "My change lessons," she said. It was a collection of clippings in which she had collected

every concrete problem and solution she had seen in her career. I perked up: they almost looked like ready-made columns.

We soon found a format. Two short paragraphs: one problem, one solution. Both are taken from real life. That form would force her to write concisely, to the point and realistically. Our designer gave the final push.

He put a white sheet of paper on the table, asking Anne, "What is the column about? In one sentence, please, not a full story. I still need to finish tomorrow's newspaper."

"Hmm, that's tricky," Anne said. "A manager is busy all day cracking nuts. It often starts with—"

"Enough," said the designer, and taking up the paper he sketched a walnut with text above it: *Nutcracker*.

In retrospect, it wasn't that easy for weeks; the texts flew back and forth between Anne and the editor-in-chief. The length of an article in a newspaper is counted in letters, not words – a particular type of horror every new columnist must undergo. But soon, a well-matched team emerged.

A perfect example of this is the column about the merger of two transport companies.

The nut to crack: How do you reconcile two completely different corporate cultures?

The Nutcracker: "Mix the trucks," she wrote. "One truck's blue cabin pulls the other's green trailer and vice versa. This way, the symbol becomes a reality, and reality becomes a symbol."

Harry Starren would have bowed his head to Ms Kloosterboer.

Jan Fred van Wijnen

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Introduction

The current change literature provides beautiful models and perspectives on five, eight or twenty steps you need to take to manage organisational change effectively. These books often do not address the issues that leaders and change enablers struggle with in unruly day-to-day practice. Issues such as: How do you really get a cost-saving operation up and running or even make it attractive? What do you do if the strategy implementation stalls in the middle layer of the organisation? And how do you prevent people return to the old working methods when they think the change process is concluded?
To me, cracking walnuts symbolises leading change.
Do you put enough time and effort into discovering which change nuts you need to crack now? Can you recognise from the shape of the nut what kind of nut it is and what it will take to open it? And instead of either doing too much, but without the intended business impact, or using too much pressure, thereby destroying organisational value, can you exert as little pressure as possible, but with just enough strength in the right place at the right time, to apply organisational interventions that ensure you unlock the organisation's potential? The image of the nut that needs to be cracked has a clarifying effect.

An illustration

During a session with 18 business unit directors, I asked them to crack two walnuts as fast as possible. The winner was the one who got the kernel out as quickly and as intact as possible. I provided eight nutcrackers, and the directors were allowed to decide how they wanted to open the nuts. This created an incredible scene; before I even realised what he was doing, one director opened the nut with his elbow very quickly, but with a dubious result, judging by all the bits and pieces. One used the nutcracker and got the kernel out speedily and almost intact. And there was one who, as it turned out later, had previous experience and opened the shell in a split second with his bare hands and extracted the kernel in its entirety. The rest were still occupied. Reflections afterwards revealed all manner of experiences with change: the directors shared examples of interventions that had been far too harsh, result-ing in many organisational fragments; examples of how they still needed to crack the same change nuts after two years because, with hindsight, they in-

tervened too gently or not in the right place; and examples of moments when a seemingly minuscule intervention was a nudge with the desired impact.

With this image in mind, one can bring leading change back to two core questions. Firstly, "What is the current unresolved change dilemma?" or "Which nut needs to be cracked now?" And secondly, what is the "best" solution for this nut – a solution that, as with cracking a walnut, exerts just the right amount of pressure in the right place, so the desired effect on the organisation, the customer and the individual is achieved most straightforwardly?[1]

In this book, you'll find the 50 common business transformation challenges with solutions to crack these nuts. Although you can read the book from beginning to end, in order, it is not necessary to approach it that way.

I would be honoured if this book ends up on your desk and you consult it each time a change journey starts, slows down or gets stuck.

Keep the following in mind:

- The book is set up so you can find your *nut to crack* using the navigation guide on page 198. This diagram allows you to do this in one minute, and refers you to the solution that belongs to this nut.
- In the book, I consciously refer to "a solution" rather than "the solution". Organisations are unique, and I do not pretend to have "the ultimate turnkey solution" or "the only answer" for your specific situation. Customisation remains the job of the leaders or enablers of organisational change: the professionals. But the suggested solutions, real-life examples and accompanying tools and tips will go a long way in steering you in the right direction.[2]
- "Leading organisational change" refers to the structured process and set of interventions that change leaders and enablers use to ensure that people change their daily behaviour sustainably. Leading organisational change properly makes a difference in realising business objectives while optimising time, energy and costs.

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1   As Albert Einstein said: "The simplest way, but no simpler than that."

2   The practical examples are based on real use cases. To ensure anonymity, names have been changed, and the context has been defined in such a way that companies and individuals are not recognisable one-to-one.

For me, the contents of this book are a step on a journey that continues. Should you have any ideas about change nuts that should be added or have proven their value, please share them.
The creation continues online at www.lq.team/nutcracker

When should you use this book?

Organisational change often occurs at a crossroads in the life cycle of organisations, somewhere on the curve from start, via growth and maturity, to endings. In the growth phase, for example, the expansion of services and products portfolio is central; in the mature phase, topics such as adapting the corporate culture or implementing new systems or processes are paramount. Sometimes it is about a self-imposed change, and sometimes circumstances force an organisation to change. Below you see twelve square blocks containing common organisational changes by life stage. In practice, several transformations often co-occur.

Start	Growth		Maturity			Closure
Start of a new business	Introduction of a new product or service	Changing or adding a business model	Change in course or strategy	A culture change	Merger, take over, strategic alliance	Sale, closure or restart
			Change in operating model or organisational structure	Building or anchoring capabilities	Cost reduction or productivity improvement	
			Introduction of new processes, systems or ways of working	Driving continuous organisational improvement or optimisation		

This book will help you lead and enable organisational change processes. These can be directly linked to the twelve organisational changes above or indirectly related to these. During management sessions, I often print these blocks on A0 paper. I ask participants to put a sticker on the blocks that apply to the change they are leading in their organisation. Initially, this may seem

like a trivial activity. Still, many people cannot actively link the stage of the organisation's life and the change they are driving – yet this is significant to the bigger picture and the business impact you want to achieve.
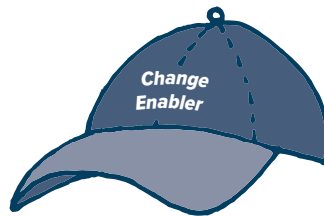
This book can be used for large and smaller organisational change questions and dilemmas. For example, you can use it today to generate ideas about how to change the behaviour of one individual in your team, tomorrow to solve the predicaments you experience introducing a new organisational structure within a department, and the day after tomorrow for the change questions that occur during a merger.

Who has this book been written for?

A person who leads change with their heart and mind by giving direction, conducting dialogues and taking decisions is someone I call the *change leader*. These are the people with ultimate responsibility for the business result, unrelated to where and at what hierarchical level they act in the organisation. Those who orchestrate and coordinate change processes are what I call *change enablers*. Usually, these are the business partners of the strategy, HR, Finance or IT departments, programme or project managers, change managers or professionals who have been temporarily appointed in an enabling role.

Change Leader	Change Enabler
Leads change through inspiration, conversation and decision-making	Orchestrates the change journey from content and process perspectives

I wrote this book for change leaders and change enablers at all levels in an organisation.