

# THE 4-ROOM APARTMENT

An optimistic and simple model for approaching change

# THE 4-ROOM APARTMENT EXPLAINED

There is a model of change offered by a Swedish social psychologist, Claes Janssen\*, which is optimistic about the ability of people to change. It's a simple model for visualizing where the potential energy is in a person, group or company – he calls it the **“Four Room Apartment.”**

Janssen says that each of us lives in a four-room apartment. We move from room to room depending on perceptions, feelings or aspirations triggered by external events. Someone who occupies a room today may, in a week, a month, or a year, have moved to another room of the apartment.

The four rooms Janssen describes are **Contentment**, **Denial**, **Confusion** and **Renewal**. Janssen says that as we change and develop as human beings (and work professionals) we continually circle through these four rooms.

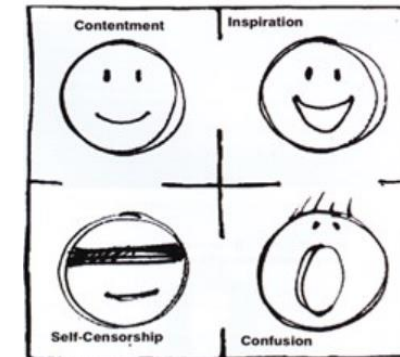
In the **Contentment** room, we like the status quo. We are seen as and feel satisfied, calm and realistic. We are uninterested in attempting improvements or major changes – “If its not broke, don't fix it.” But we can't stay in contentment of course or we would never grow. Development occurs primarily in response to the challenges of life. No one gets through life without continually being presented with new, and often very difficult, challenges. A significant challenge - a new born baby, divorce, death of close relative, reorganization, new leader, market crisis, job threat – can move us out of the Contentment room into the Denial room.

In a sense, people in the **Denial** room, already have the facts – that's what they are in denial about. It's the parent who finds herself still dealing with an adult son as though he were a teenager. Or the manager who, a year after his promotion to the new job, is fighting what everyone else already recognizes, that he has not made the switch from being an engineer to manager. They are, for their own reasons, not yet ready to deal with those facts. From the outside they are perceived as unaware or afraid of change.

When we are in the Denial room and finally acknowledges what we have been hiding from, that doesn't solve our problem; it only moves us through the door into the **Confusion** (or Self-Censorship) room. Here we are seen as, and feel different, out of touch, scattered, and unsure. We muck about in the Confusion room, sorting out bits and pieces of our lives. Far from a state to be avoided Confusion signifies a readiness to learn. People in the Confusion room acknowledge they don't have the answer. They have energy to spare; they just haven't decided where to invest it.

We stay in Confusion until we own up to whatever fear or anxiety is keeping us from committing to the new. That moves us through the door to the **Renewal** (or Inspiration) room, and now we are perceived as, and feel, sincere, open, willing to risk. People in Renewal are trying out new practices and ideas. They are open to site visits to see what others have done and looking for articles about the latest innovation. The Renewal room feels like a place full of new converts, ready to put energy into a new path and wanting to convert others to the answer they've found.

Of course, over time the feeling of renewal and inspiration subsides. We get comfortable with the new program, lifestyle, or relationship and we find ourselves back in the Contentment room. We have it “all worked out,” we have answers and we function comfortably within them; life is good.



## *The 4-Room Apartment in the professional work context*

*Residing in any room is not a characteristic of a person's personality; it is rather where they are at this time and in regard to this particular change. In time they will move because we all live in all four rooms.*

*As leaders or change agents, whose task it is to mobilize energy for a change, we need to work with people in the Confusion or Renewal rooms. In every Confusion room there are people already taking constructive action. They would welcome help to obtain needed resources or to coordinate activities with others. It is they who will carry the initiative forward – if they can be brought together to learn how their initiatives integrate with the whole. The seeds of success are sown in the Confusion room and sprout in the Renewal room.*

*The people in the Contentment or Denial rooms are not frozen, events will move them soon enough. But to mobilize change people in the Contentment or Denial rooms are not an effective place to spend a lot of energy or time. We need to continue to involve them in meetings with their colleagues, provide them information, but not to make them the focus of our efforts.*

*All of us need some part of our lives to remain stable especially when other parts feel like they are in confusion. When professionals are dealing with personal problems like a divorce, birth of a new child, adjusting to a child leaving for college – or when they are dealing with work issues that are disorienting, being passed over for promotion, or failure of a project, they need stability in the other parts of their lives. And sometimes that stability is bought with denial. But when those troubling issues get resolved, then they have the energy to attend to what they had not seen before.*

# MOVEMENT THROUGHOUT THE CHANGE PROCESS

Change always involved letting go of the past and creating something new in its place.

That gives a sense of the movement between the four rooms; from Contentment via Denial and Confusion into Inspiration/Renewal. The change process may be described through four phases:

## Phase 1:

Contentment is lost.

## Phase 2:

We defend the old status quo, moving into Denial, or Self- Censorship

## Phase 3:

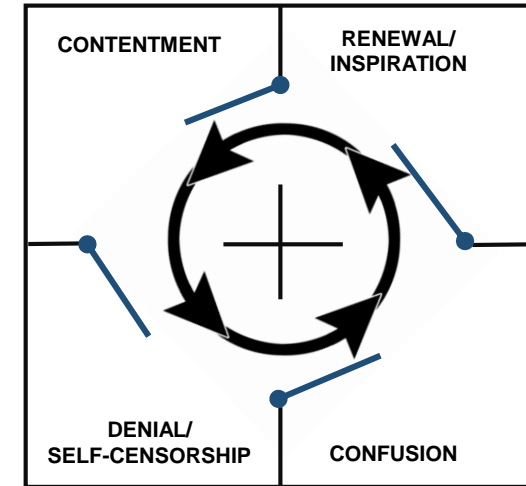
We fumble around, on the verge of letting go of the past but still uncertain about accepting what is new: Confusion.

## Phase 4:

We discover the new opportunities: Inspiration, or Renewal.

If we succeed in realizing the new opportunities that we have discovered in Inspiration/Renewal, we can return to a state of Contentment which, in its new form, is probably richer, more liberating and more fun than the old.

The key to efficiency and personal well-being is the movement itself – leaving the doors open between the different rooms.

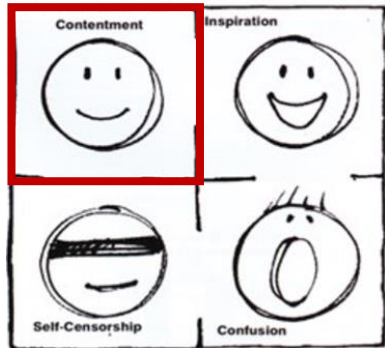


Walking through the doors – ‘making the move’ – requires a certain approach to change, as action or mindset:

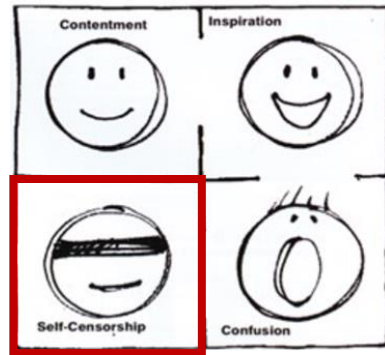
- |                                  |                          |
|----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The Door to Denial:              | Indifference             |
| The Door to Confusion:           | Making the break-through |
| The Door to Inspiration/Renewal: | Courage                  |
| The Door to Contentment:         | Compromise               |

# KEY CONCEPTS IN THE FOUR PHASES

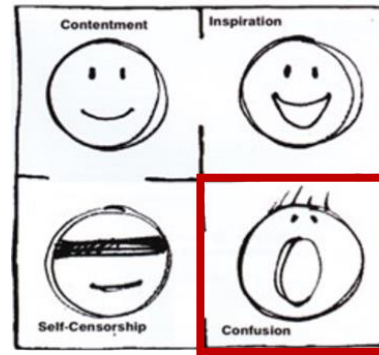
Below are key words that describe the emotions, behavior and perceived life situation in each of the four phases in the change process:



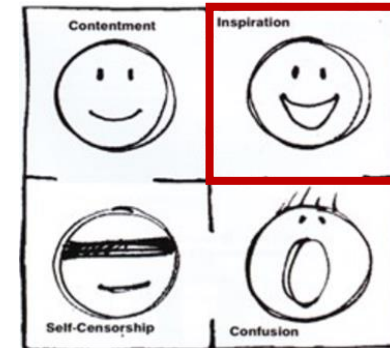
- We
- Together
- Today or tomorrow
- Just being
- Adult/caring parent
- Wanting to...
- Things are just fine



- Others (other people's fault)
- Yours and mine
- Yesterday
- Putting on a front
- Critical parent
- Can't be bothered
- Things were better before



- You or me
- Can I join in?
- Tomorrow
- Looking for an identity
- The child in you (uncertain)
- Searching for enthusiasm
- Wanting things to be good again



- Me
- My way / my ideas
- Now
- Self-realization
- The child in me, curious, fearless
- I'm living out me feelings
- Things have never been better

# THE 4-ROOM APARTMENT IN A NUTSHELL

## CONTENTMENT



Things are under control and work well. These are important for your success. You perceive a sense of security as a basis you can use to build for the future.

You are generally relaxed and decisions are realistic and well considered. You need to take good care of these things and not fall into Denial. These things should not be changed.

The majority of people feel comfortable in this room, while some can be frustrated by the harmonic climate.

## RENEWAL/ INSPIRATION



You love to work with things and those give you energy and motivation. You know what must be done and you openly talk about it and strive to engage others in your creative endeavors.

This is where you want to be. You do your utmost, sometimes so much that other things are forgotten. The climate is enthusiastic and it's easy to ignore limitations. Things proceed effectively and you tend to forget asking others for feedback. There are changes going on and things are developing.

Almost all people really enjoy life and work when being in this room. For some people, however, it could become a bit too unstructured and messy.

## DENIAL/ SELF-CENSORSHIP



Things are done with a low amount of energy and you don't show this openly. You avoid talking about these things, or pretend that you are satisfied with the way they are. You are not really honest, and deep inside you know that something is wrong.

You tend to put the blame on other people, make excuses for why you are not responsible for the situation things are in. You find 'escape routes' for avoiding to unpleasant work, which would require to tackle these problems. These things are needed to be brought to the surface and changed.

The majority of people feel bad in this room, but they try to hide this by masking their true feelings, or they are simply not yet aware that there is a problem.

## CONFUSION



Things are openly questioned and create frustration every time they appear as a topic. You are unsure and there are different opinions about these and what is right to do.

When these things are discussed or thought about a lot of energy is created. You need clarity and somebody (you or another person) to take the lead and do something about it. You need to listen carefully to your inner compass as well as the opinion of others.

You need to consider the different alternatives. You want to change and choose the right way forward, but it's not easy to see the problem and find the solution that is acceptable for yourself and people around you.

Many people are frustrated in this room and show it openly, while others are silent and hide their uncertainty, trying to radiate that they are sure what to do.

# IN WHICH ROOM ARE YOU?

## **EXERCISE:**

In which room are you right now – in your personal life and/or at work?

Is it time to move (make a change) and how will you do that?

What will you do about it right now?

NOTES: