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Reinventing Perspectives on Organizational Change

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Today's business environment is dynamic and highly uncertain. To become and remain successful, organizations must successfully respond to constantly changing conditions. Much of the literature has researched and supported an organization's response to continuously changing conditions, recognizing that their response can no longer be occasional. Change events need to be planned, and designed to respond to what is viewed as unexpected or continuous change. Organizations must have the capacity for continuous and adaptive organizational change and the capacity for continuous and adaptive organizational change is now an essential organizational competency. Critical business issues such as systems improvement, application of technological innovation, organizational learning, and change management should be managed in real time if organizations are to remain competitive. Leading organizational change has become one of the essential core competencies of business professionals today.

There is no shortage of articles on change theory, organizational development, change management or any number of other descriptors for this field of study. However, the literature suggests there is not one single approach or methodology that is comprehensive yet concise enough to serve as a practical guide for change practitioners (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Dunphy, 1981). This mutually exclusive approach to change resulted in a mixture of change models that, while they all contain an element of truth, they do not tend to promote the general understanding of this subject matter. Theories are often contradictory, hard to translate to a specific organizational context and difficult to make sense. This paper will provide a brief overview of the various perspectives that have guided the field of organization development and change management, with sections that will describe practical application of change management intervention methods for targets of change, and understanding organizational change resistance.

This paper will also introduce the reader to a rich literature review to assist in understanding the breadth of this field and while there is a great deal known in the area of organizational development and change management, there is a full range of issues still to be addressed. This provides the change practitioner with an overview of the approach and methodology used to identify the relevant literature from the peer-

reviewed research literature, as I wanted to integrate the results of this review with an overall assessment of the implications of practical applications.

Early Beginnings of Organizational Change

Much of the literature concentrates on best practices for successful implementation of change, and provides models, frameworks, tools and cases to assist practitioners in managing change more effectively (Kotter, 1996; Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2001). This does not mean that the models and methods for managing change have not been grounded in academic theory and research, however it is unclear. There are a variety of ways of categorizing the majority of change management models. There are models which provide prescriptive steps of what to do and what not to do (Dunphy, 1981; Kanter, 1983; Kotter, 1996) which have been developed from the authors' experiences with companies either as consultants and/or researchers. There are groupings that provide specific diagnostic tools and approaches to support key change management issues such as resistance to change (Eriksson, 2004; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), rates of adoption of change for individuals (Huy, 2001), communications (Ford & Ford, 1995; Barrett, Thomas & Hocevar, 1995), and organizational culture (Schein, 1984; 1992).

In *The Change Masters* (1983), Kanter describes a model of change designed to guide executives in promoting innovation and entrepreneurship within their organizations. In her model, Kanter identifies three activities that characterize innovation leading to change: problem definition, coalition building and mobilization. She argues that leaders who wish to promote innovation should do so using collaborative and participative approaches. William Bridges (1980, 1991; Bridges & Mitchell, 2002) in the 80's and 90's advanced our understanding of change leadership by describing knowledge gained during his work experience with people experiencing personal and career change, and then observing organizational change. Bridges differentiates between organizational change and transition. Change, he says, is about what will be altered; transition is about how the change will feel for those required to make it. Change can be planned and managed using a more or less rational model was his basic premise.

Since then, there have been many authors, scholars and researchers that have described the steps involved in planning and managing change. Kotter (1996) describes eight steps to transforming an organization, including establishing a sense of urgency;

forming a powerful guiding coalition; creating a vision; communicating the vision; empowering others to act on the vision; planning for and creating short-term wins; consolidating improvements and producing still more change; and institutionalizing new approaches. Ackerman-Anderson and Anderson (2001) describe a change leadership process that is continuous and non-linear and incorporates an evaluation component. Their steps include preparing to lead the change; creating vision, commitment and capacity; assessing the situation and determining design requirements; designing the desired state; analyzing the impact; planning and organizing for implementation; implementing the change; celebrating and integrating the new state; and applying lessons learned.

The systems approach to organizational change makes it possible to describe change based on all characteristics of change; the change system presents all those attributes dynamically and at the same time (Stacey, 1995). Organizations are often considered a system within the process approach to change (Kerzner, 1987; 2000). It is less obvious to consider the change mechanisms in an organization as a system by themselves. Systems language has proven itself designed for managing management problems more than any other single discipline (Jackson, 2000).

Authors Van de Ven & Poole (1995) addressed change from the perspective of life cycle changes, teleological, dialectical, and evolutionary changes. Their conclusion suggests each theory is typically incomplete in its description/classification of change because organizations do not exist within a vacuum and one theory can address the assumptions of another. Understanding organizational change requires more than one theory (Dunphy, 1981). Dunphy further considered the components of a comprehensive theory of organizational change. Frameworks such as this allow us to evaluate theoretical approaches and determine whether the theory is complete, and allow us to compare theoretical traditions and determine whether they are similar or different. This provides a greater understanding on how we would direct our attention in analysis with regard to internal or external factors affecting the organization, and to the levels of analysis with key groups within the workforce.

It is recognized that during corporate transformations depending on the external influences, new theories emerged. Enz (2003) suggests that transformation change is a radical shift in an organization's business model and that the change is so substantial it

requires the organization to alter its culture causing people to revise their behaviors and attitudes. These complex problems dealing with people and major transformation suggest that you cannot solve them with a technical solution or approach. For these business challenges to be solved people are going to have to learn new ways of doing business.

Businesses are recognizing that change continues to build at an alarming rate; it is viewed as a continuous process and that a systematic and disciplined structure is required for managing this tremendous amount of change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Romanelli and Tushman (1994) suggest through an emergent model of organizational transformation, organizations typically undergo long stretches of relative stability, punctuated by periods of revolutionary change. These periods cause disruption in the organization and lay the groundwork for the next period of equilibrium to occur.

Dunphy and Stace distinguish between incremental changes and transformations. They claim that this distinction is not a matter of speed (slow or fast) but of frequency (Dunphy & Stace, 1988). Depending on environmental fit, organizational structure and management ability one needs to strategize for planned change and one needs to determine the appropriate organizational fit for discontinuous or continuous change needs. Ford and Ford describe the degree to which changes are being controlled when indicating the differences between intentional and unintentional changes depending on whether a change agent effects change deliberately or whether changes occur accidentally or as side effects (Ford & Ford, 1995). Huy discusses the aspects of time and content of changes that according to him have been neglected in the literature (Huy, 2001).

Utilizing intervention methods for targets of change

The term "intervention" refers to a set of sequenced, planned actions or events intended to help an organization increase its effectiveness (Farquhar, 2006). Interventions purposely disrupt the status quo; they are deliberate attempts to change an organization or targeted aspect within the organization toward a different and more effective state (Dannemiller & Jacobs, 1992). This section will briefly summarize the criteria for effective interventions, factors that impact the success of organization development interventions and discuss intervention methods that are appropriate for different targets of change and why.

Intervention Effectiveness

In Organization Development (OD) three major criteria define the effectiveness of an intervention: the extent to which interventions fit the needs of the organization, the degree to which it is based on causal knowledge of intended outcomes, and the extent to which the OD intervention transfers change management competence to organization employees (Farquhar, 2006). Intervention success depends heavily on the organization being ready for planned change. The capability of managing planned change requires particular knowledge and skills including the ability to motivate change, to lead change, to develop political support, to manage transition, and to sustain momentum.

Types of Interventions

Interventions can be grouped in a number of ways. I will briefly summarize each category and provide an example. Human Process Interventions according to Beer and Walton (1990) deal with interpersonal relationships and group dynamics. This change method is a form of process consultation aimed at dysfunctional interpersonal relations in organizations. Team building is one intervention example that helps work groups become more effective in accomplishing tasks. Techno-Structural Interventions deal with an organization's technology and structure, addressing the organization's division of labor, task performances and diagnostic guidelines exist to determine which structure is appropriate for particular organizational environments, technologies, and conditions (Spreitzer, Cohen, & Ledford, 1999; Spreizter, De Janasz & Quinn, 1996). An example would be process re-engineering and this intervention redesigns the organization's core work processes to create stronger linkage and coordination among the different tasks and work groups. Human Resource Management Interventions include improving the organization's effectiveness by interventions that design the organization's human resource policies and practices (Pfeffer, 1998) such as, compensation and reward systems, training and development, managing workforce planning and diversity. Strategic Interventions link the internal functioning of the organization to the larger environment and transform the organization to keep pace with changing conditions (Burke, 2002). Integrated strategic change strategies and organizational systems are coordinated in response to external and internal influences. An example would be a strategic change plan that helps employees manage the

transition between a current strategy and organization design and the desired future strategic orientation.

Targets of Change

Targets of change relate to the specific targets at which OD interventions are targeted. OD interventions are aimed at different levels of the organization (Farquhar, 2006): individual, group, organization and multinational organizations, or between the organization and its suppliers, customers, etc. I have provided an example in Table 1 that summarizes an effective way of guiding which intervention methods are appropriate for different targets of change, linked with expectations and measures.

Table 1 – Example of Intervention and Targets of Change

Targets of Change	Intervention	Activities	Expected Change	Evidence of Change
Who are you trying to affect?	*What are you trying to do?*	*Examples of Intervention Activities by Target Group*	*What do you think will happen as a result of your intervention?*	*How do you know the change has happened?*
Individual (all staff)	Develop and implement a Strategic Change Plan that addresses the culture change shift expected as a result of this major IT implementation	• Active Listening • Guided Study • Reflection	This intervention helps organizations develop cultures (behaviors, values, beliefs and norms) appropriate to their new strategies and environments.	Feedback mechanisms such as, Employee Survey Results, Questionnaires, Focus Groups
Team/Group (departments/ sub units)		• Team Building • Action Research • Training • Appreciative Inquiry		Tracking of Completion and Results
Organization		• Open Space • Strategic Planning • Visioning • Whole System Events		

Contributing Factors to Intervention Effectiveness

Early intervention approaches, such as action research was adopted by social scientists and practitioners to link research with actual practice (Poole & Van De Ven, 2004). Researchers and practitioners partnered to collect data about what's going on in the organization system, diagnose the situation and take action and evaluate the results (Argyis, Putnam, McLain & Smith, 1990). The primary target of change was focused on changing individuals or groups at the exclusion of whole systems. Interventions focused on team building, and personal development. And then in the 1980s the pace of change accelerated and global competition, turbulent markets and technological advancements caused organizations to make radical changes to their business models and strategies (Poole & Van De Ven, 2004).

Large-scale interventions, with a focus on creating a preferred future (rather than on solving problems), enabled OD practitioners to bring together the stakeholders of a system to join around important organizational challenges. Large-scale change interventions are powerful because they are effective in aligning large groups in a common direction and they reduce the amount of time needed for change. Dannemiller & Jacobs (1992) furthered work in the area of large-scale change to addressing the influence of the growth of technology in business. French and Bell's (1978) definition of OD focused on the target of the change and specific intervention. Their focus was on strategic issues and the way in which the conceptual, strategic and practical levels of the organization system fit together.

Porras and Robertson (1987) developed an organizational development theory that helps explain the ongoing tension between the theory of change and the practice of changing. Their contribution of implementation theory focuses on the intervention activities needed to execute effective planned change.

Appreciative inquiry is an open systems method of change based on the core assumptions that people create their own realities through dialogue and action (Royal, 2006). People are much more energized for change when they focus on what's working, rather than focusing on what's not working, and building a vision for the future engaging people's commitment for change. Bushe's (1998) use of appreciative inquiry involves a team process that focuses on positive team experiences. In this intervention,

team members are asked to recall their best team experience and share it with the group.

Interventions provide a structured way to deliver advice to targets of change and involve the provision of more formal support, such as arranging follow-up support or training. Behavior change interventions are much more effective when they target specific behaviors, rather than raising general awareness. Interventions should target behaviors based on an assessment of an understanding of the responsiveness or resistance of the recipients of the change. Changing aspects of an organization can have far-reaching effects. When designing an intervention it is crucial to consider what indirect changes will result from the targeted change. Because of organizational complexity, interventions help organizational leaders and change agents.

Early change interventions focused on helping organizations get better through people; approaches evolved and focused attention on transformational change to explore how external events, trends and developments drive the need for new strategies, structures, norms and so on. While more recent OD approaches focus on transformational change, they are based on the assumption that the past has value. Organizational change and change management initiatives have revealed, in more recent times, a move from problem-centred, discrete interventions (Oswick, Grant, Michelson & Wailes, 2005) to a focus on continuous improvements, such as organizational learning and knowledge management.

Sometimes the effectiveness of a change intervention does not imply behavioral change. Interventions designed to address change resistance may result in changes but not in actual behavior change. This next section provides perspectives on business realization that changing the organization is unlikely without requiring their people to change.

Understanding organizational change resistance

There is an increasing sensitivity to the problems that people will experience with change initiatives that are designed to transform the business (Austin & Currie, 2003; Kendra & Taplin, 2004). While there are a variety of models of change found in the literature (Kotter, 1996; Becker & Joroff, 2000; Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Nelson, 2003), individual circumstances may suggest choosing a particular model, or parts of it, over another. This section offers a discussion on the concept of "resistance"

in understanding organizational change, how it has been understood, how it has influenced practice, and how it might limit our understanding. In this section, I will cover who in the literature has contributed to this topic and what others have said about it. In addition I will provide a critical reflection on what I think has been contributed to this area using practitioner examples.

In today's economy, managing successful large scale change can be very difficult. It happens continuously, and often at rapid speed. The process can be slow and complex due to a number of extraneous factors surrounding a change initiative. Because change has become an everyday part of organizational dynamics, employees who resist change can actually affect the stability of an organization. Resistance is an inevitable response to any major change (Herold & Fedor, 2008). Individuals naturally rush to defend the status quo if they feel their security or status is threatened. Folger & Skarlicki (1999) claim that organizational change can generate uncertainty and resistance in employees, contributing to the primary reasons why organizational improvements are challenging.

The most successful change initiatives reach out to people's hearts as well as their minds, influencing their emotions as well as their thoughts (Fullan, 2006; Kerber & Buono, 2005). Removing obstacles enhanced people's willingness to change. With the variety of models, frameworks and theoretical perspectives available to address the nature of organizational change (Kotter, 1996; Beer and Nohia, 2000; Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2001) there appears to be consensus that organizational transformations involving large scale, strategic change require a planned approach, a road map for providing direction on how to arrive at your desired state (Kotter 1996; Tschudy 2006). In order to successfully implement change in organizations, leaders need to understand how human dynamics can affect the success of the change effort (Austin and Currie, 2003). When faced with significant change, a reduction in productivity and efficiency occurs (Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson, 2001; Kendra & Taplin, 2004; Herold & Fedor, 2008). The significance of this loss depends on how well the organization addresses the transition (Bridges 1991); how well it is managed will cause less disruption to the business.

The first known published reference to research on resistance to change in organizations was a 1948 study conducted by Coch and French entitled "Overcoming Resistance to Change." Their research focused on why do people resist change so

powerfully? And what can be done to overcome this resistance? Dent & Goldberg (1999) further suggested that for practicing managers they needed to know what the resistance means so that they may reduce it by working on the causes rather than the symptoms.

Many authors have presented strategies to address resistance. Kotter and Schlesinger (1979) identified six approaches to dealing with resistance that is still very useful today. These approaches ranged from education and communication, to participation and involvement, to facilitation and support, to negotiation, and manipulation or coercion. The particular strategy chosen needs to be a fit that will address the reason for resistance, giving consideration to the amount and type of resistance anticipated (fear, withdrawal, disruption); balance of power and trust issues between change agent and employee; energy for implementing the change (both the project leaders and the stakeholders); and the risk involved and consequences of failure to change (for both the project leaders and the stakeholders).

Influencing our Practices

Traditional models of organizational change (Lewin, 1951) indicate that change processes should be deliberately planned and managed. Changing the attitudes and values of staff, selling the vision, implementing the change and sustaining it were concepts added to new change models (Kotter, 1996; Mento, Jones & Dirndorfer, 2002; Lacroix, 2001). However, both the anticipated changes brought about by project initiatives and unexpected changes that occur as the organization is implementing the preplanned changes are a neglected area. Managing these challenges, project uncertainty plus unexpected operational changes, is a difficult exercise best managed by focused project management and effectively managing the changes. Since then, many authors have described the steps involved in planning and managing change. Kotter (1996) describes eight steps to transforming an organization, including establishing a sense of urgency; forming a powerful guiding coalition; creating a vision; communicating the vision; empowering others to act on the vision; planning for and creating short-term wins; consolidating improvements and producing still more change; and institutionalizing new approaches.

Ackerman-Anderson and Anderson (2001) describe a change leadership process that is continuous and non-linear and incorporates an evaluation component. Their steps include preparing to lead the change; creating vision, commitment and capacity; assessing the situation and determining design requirements; designing the desired state; analyzing the impact; planning and organizing for implementation; implementing the change; celebrating and integrating the new state; and learning and course-correcting. If management does not understand, accept and make an effort to work with resistance, it can undermine even the most well-intentioned and well-conceived change efforts. Change management helps employers gain acceptance of the change by employees and minimizes the instability that results during implementation of change. This often results in productivity loss due to resistance to the change or difficulty in accepting new processes or technology. There is an increasing sensitivity to the problems that people experience with change initiatives that are designed to transform the business (Austin and Currie, 2003; Kendra and Taplin, 2004). Examining the theories and different perspectives that impact how people react to changes is an important step as businesses prepare to manage change.

In order to understand the concept of employee resistance, it is critical to define what is meant by the term resistance. Dent & Goldberg (1999) defined resistance to change as the behavior that is intended to protect an individual from the effects of real or imagined change. Zaltman & Duncan (1977) defined resistance as the behavior that maintains the status quo in the face of pressure to alter the status quo. Folger & Skarlicki (1999) emphasize that employee resistance is behavior that seeks to challenge, disrupt, or invert prevailing assumptions, discourses, and power relations. Piderit (2000) believed that the definition of the term resistance incorporates a broader perspective involving a review of past empirical research. This revealed three different conceptualizations of resistance: cognitive state, emotional state, and as a behavior. From their early study, Coch and French (1948) acknowledged aggression and frustration in employees as the emotional factors that caused undesirable behaviors and resistance to change. Argyris and Schon (1974, 1978) noted that resistance to change is a defense mechanism caused by frustration and anxiety (Piderit, 2000).

The list of reasons why individuals might be resistant to organizational change is diverse, as previously discussed. Employees resist change because they have to learn something new. In many cases, there is not a disagreement with the benefits of the new

process, but rather a fear of the unknown future and about their ability to adapt to it. de Jager (2001) makes a case that generally individuals are suspicious about the unfamiliar and are naturally concerned about how to transition from the old to the new, and the learning and training that might be involved in getting to that state. Low tolerance for change is defined as the fear that one will not be able to develop new skills and behaviors that are required in a new work setting. According to Kotter & Schlesinger (1979), if an employee has a low tolerance for change, the increased ambiguity that results as a result of having to perform their job differently would likely cause a resistance to the new way of doing things. An employee may understand that a change is needed, but may be emotionally unable to make the transition and resist for reasons they may not consciously understand.

Folger & Skarlicki (1995) investigated resistance to change as a response to the treatment employees receive in the change process. Specifically they focus on resentment associated with resistance and suggest that employee reactions are associated with disgruntled employees and their perceived unfairness of the change. Folger & Skarlicki (1995) further claim that resistance behaviors can range from subtle acts of non-cooperation to industrial sabotage, and that these behaviors are often viewed as justifiable and a way for employees to exercise their power in the way that they can.

Morgan (1997) suggested that an understanding of the theory of transitional phenomena would provide valuable insight into organizational change, and why it might be met with employee resistance. This theory suggested that change will occur only when people are prepared to give up what is important to them. Eriksson (2004) summarizes research literature on organizational change and theoretical perspectives on obstacles to change, in particular emphasizing human resistance. In addition to concepts by Kotter (1996), Bartunek (1984), Kanter (1983), Eriksson (2004) suggests a number of other common problems associated with the acceptance of change, politics and conflicts between groups, personal loss at all levels of the organization, differing reactions to change, misunderstanding the implications of the change.

A Practitioner's Example

In this example, the leadership team about to implement a major business transformation initiative recognized the need to take a proactive role in managing the significant organizational change. The business, people, processes and tools required to implement this strategy would all be affected during the implementation stage. An effective Organization Change Management plan was developed by line management modeled after Kotter (1996; 2005) and Ackerman-Anderson & Anderson (2001) to take the business from its current structure to a new business model designed to ensure that changes impacting staff would be addressed. The following steps were taken:

1. Development of key objectives associated with a change management plan included strengthening and developing new cultural/behavioral values that are consistent with best in class organizations; recommending programs and plans that will ensure staff successfully adapt to their new careers in the organization; and, anticipating the needs of the organization during this implementation and to develop interventions and programs that are flexible and that will adapt to changing needs.

2. Ensuring alignment with the vision and strategy, clarifying the general direction for change, motivating people to take action in the right direction, coordinating actions of different people in a fast and efficient way. Key elements in the effective communication of the vision are simplicity, using examples, using multiple forums, repetition, and leadership by example, two way communication and addressing inconsistencies.

3. Obtaining management readiness and commitment involved selecting the right team to direct the change effort. Ensuring people are capable and competent when changes occur is important, as part of the overall change will require new capabilities and skills required by managers, supervisors and staff during the change process, as well as for the future end state.

4. Obtaining and maintaining continued commitment for the implementation of the change initiative with continued commitment of all levels of leadership.

5. The goal of an effective communication strategy and plan for this organizational initiative was implemented to achieve a common understanding of and focus on the activities of executing the change. One strategy is an effort to connect the change initiative objectives and goals with the work staff perform and on the priorities that

people must share to make the business succeed. The challenge is to develop messages that further people's understanding, acceptance and support for this organizational change effort.

Reflection on organizational change perspectives

Employee resistance to change is a complex issue facing management in the complex and ever-evolving organization of today. The process of change is everywhere, and employee resistance has been identified as a critically important contributor to the failure of many well intended and well planned out efforts within organizations. In many cases, vast amounts of resources are expended by organizations to ease the adjustment of employees to a new way of achieving desired goals. The natural tendency for individuals to protect the status quo presents a set of challenges that management must overcome in order to bring about desired change. Management must also seriously take into account and consider the multitude of problems that may result if they are not responsive to issues of resistance in the workplace.

About the Author

Kathy Cowan Sahadath is a Program Manager and Change Leader in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. Her current position involves supporting the increasing number of strategic organizational change transformations. She specifically addresses the people side of change at all levels of an organization, working in concert with business leaders, project leaders, and with change teams. Their aim is to improve overall organizational capacity for managing change, by developing and mentoring change leaders from within the business and supporting them as they take on change-related assignments.

Kathy's professional education includes an undergraduate degree from the University of Waterloo in Psychology, an MBA in Project Management from Athabasca University, a Masters of Arts degree in Human and Organizational Development from Fielding Graduate University, and a PhD in Human and Organizational Systems specializing in the area of organizational change and leadership also from Fielding Graduate University, in Santa Barbara California.

In addition to Kathy's corporate responsibilities, she is involved as a volunteer/board member with the Toronto Forum on Organizational Change, The International Council on Organizational Change, Editorial Board Member of the Change Leader, the Academy of Management, Project Management Institute, Project Research Institute, a Founding Board Member of the Association of Change Management Professionals (ACMP) Toronto Chapter, and the ACMP Practice Analysis Task Force.

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