

Taking the Teflon Off Change: An Approach for Education and Application

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Abstract

This chapter provides a review of scholarly perspectives on change management and a recommendation for managing transformational change that is based on this review. A review of the literature reveals that most research into change management can be placed into one of four areas. These four areas are (1) how to involve people in organizational change, (2) how to use theory- or model-based approaches in organizational change, (3) a focus on specific parts of an organization for successful change, and (4) case studies that explore experiences in change management. Examples from each of these four perspectives are reviewed. Following this review, the chapter presents a model-based approach that addresses leadership needs, organizational components, and the involvement of organizational members in the planning and deployment of an organizational change. This whole-system view is then discussed from two perspectives: first, as a pedagogical strategy recommended for leadership educators to use in their training on change management; second, how change leaders can apply the presented method in organizational settings.

Introduction

An ongoing concern in organizational change management (CM) is that enacted changes can, and often do, return to a former (or similar to former) state. In CM literature, estimates of CM failure rates vary but are not uncommonly quoted to be 70 percent—a percentage that was twice identified in two separate *Harvard Business Review* articles (Beer et al., 1990; Kotter, 1995). Though Hughes (2011) questions this percentage and provides an extensive review of the use of this figure in CM literature, it is not a figure that is out of line when compared with other CM failure estimates. Burnes (2009), for

example, finds that change failure estimates commonly fall between 60 percent and 90 percent. Though the frequency of CM failure may be in question, it seems safe to say, as Burnes (2011) puts it, “That many organizations do seem to struggle to implement change successfully” (p. 446).

In framing a discussion around CM failure, Burnes (2011) poses three questions. The first question Burnes asks is, “How reliable is the data on change failure?” Though a more precise understanding of this information can be helpful for benchmarking purposes, an answer to this question does not, in and of itself, help advance a strategy for improving CM success rates. Burnes asks two additional questions which are more to the point for this article:

- Why does change fail?
- What can organizations do to improve their CM success rate?

In Burnes (2011), the author asks these questions as part of his preface for the edition of the *Journal of Change Management* that was dedicated to the question of CM failure. He ends this preface by introducing three articles. Hughes (2011) explores the question of how reliable failure rate data is. McClellan (2011) discusses the roll of communication and its impact on change in an organization. Raelin and Cataldo (2011) examine the experiences of one organization’s failed change initiative to promote what they see as the vital role of middle management in a successful change process.

Both McClellan (2011) and Raelin and Cataldo (2011) are examples of two of the different types of articles found in CM literature; the former being an article that focuses on how organizational members are or can be involved in the process, and the other focusing on one organizational component as this same golden key. In the case of Raelin and Cataldo, the key being, how middle management is used in a change process. It is, to at least a small degree, somewhat ironic that researchers and authors who purport to be looking at a subject as large as change within an organization select as their focus only one element of an organization and call whatever they are addressing a key to greater success in change management. Yet, this proclivity is not a new one.

Both research-based and non-research-based writings about organizational change and change management tend to fall into one of four areas: (1) interpersonal elements in organizational change, (2) how to use theory- or model-based approaches in organizational change, (3) a focus on specific parts of an organization for successful change, and (4) case studies that explore past experiences in change management. Reviewing a few examples of each type of article will help build the foundation for the present work. After a review of examples in each of the four categories, a composite model will be offered as a whole-system-type approach to change management planning and process. The chapter will conclude with both a recommendation for how to teach this approach and a strategy for applying this approach in the field.

A Review of Change Management Literature

Interpersonal Elements-Based Works in CM Literature

Reporting on the role employees accepted while re-engineering services at the Ohio State University Libraries, Schlosser (2013) espouses what she called a “grassroots planning process.” Schlosser reported a number of principles that aided in the success of this faculty-led effort. Grassroots characteristics listed by Schlosser included such things as executive committee support, voluntary participation, using a “phased” process, and use of appreciative inquiry method. For Schlosser’s, it was the combination of these people-centric items that led to a successful change experience with the OSU Libraries.

Referred to earlier in this article, McClellan (2011) reviews a failed change initiative that took place at a college of art and design. Reporting an opposite experience from that of Schlosser (2013), McClellan’s case study documents a change effort in a college of art and design wherein organizational members did not have fluid communication during the initiative. Lack of sufficient dialogue between different groups within the organization led to the eventual demise of the change. One may say that no matter how one looks at CM, the success of any CM effort lies, ultimately, in the people within an organization, for what is an organization but a collection of people? Still, as other

investigations focus on different elements, the review of these other elements is worth identifying.

Continuing this theme, Levasseur (2013) suggested that involvement in effective change management practices can “facilitate the development of soft skills, such as self-awareness, communication, collaboration, and leadership.” Levasseur’s focus is not on how to involve people in the change management process, his writing notes phenomena that few would disagree with; that effective involvement of team members in organizational change projects will, in fact, help team members develop themselves as well. Though Lavasseur’s work is indexed as one in the CM realm, here again emphasis is on the people within an organization rather than on the organization itself.

For the most part, when articles of CM discuss people, they are usually written about either the leadership (Harris, 2010), or about the involvement of organizational team members (McClellan, 2011; Schlosser, 2013). Recommendations for how to engage team members vary by article. Considering this category of CM literature, recommendations for involving team members regularly list the following six actions:

- Education
- Communication
- Participation
- Involvement
- Facilitation
- Support

One thing is clear throughout this segment of the literature, full leadership backing and full team member buy-in lead to the best chance at lasting transformational change. The level at which these things are missing in an organizational change effort, may very well indicate the likelihood that the intended change will not last.

Theories, Concepts, and Models-Based Works in CM Literature

A number of works in the CM-based literature focus on theories, concepts, and models and their utility in preparation of or application to CM work.

A good example of this is the work of Boga and Ensari (2009). Boga and Ensari studied the role of transformational leadership and its connection to perceived success in organizational change. To investigate this, they reviewed the survey responses of eighty-two individuals who worked in a variety of organizations. Participants were asked questions about their experiences with change in their respective organizations. Researchers also asked questions that helped them identify the leadership types of respondents' supervisors (transactional or transformational). Boga and Ensari found that those who reported to transformational leaders reported organizational changes as more successful compared to those supervised by transactional leaders. Note that the researchers in this case were not interested in measuring actual CM effectiveness, but only the perceived success of the change for the organization.

There are numerous examples of theoretical applications to CM in the literature. Driscoll and Morris (2001) explore rhetorical devices and cultural change management. Jones and Wallace (2005) investigate the role of ambiguity in change management. Complexity theory and its implications for CM were looked at by Cilliers (2000). Appreciative intelligence (Thatchenkery, 2013) has also been cited as useful for informing CM practice. Focusing on this aspect of CM literature, Graetz and Smith (2010) provide one of the most extensive reviews of philosophies that have been connected to CM research. Graetz and Smith provide a review of eleven different philosophical/conceptual models that appear in CM literature. For those looking for the best understanding of how theoretical models have been applied in CM research and writing, work by Graetz and Smith would be a good place to start.

The question of invoking theory, concepts, and models over empirical evidence to guide CM efforts has itself been raised. Cruickshank and Collins (2012) call attention to this as a weakness in CM-related literature. They find a "predominant theoretical focus on process" (p. 213), which provides more about the use of theory for academic inquiry than they do finding solutions to ROI or other tangible impacts on organizations with respect to change. Using theory, concepts, or models as a launch point for CM work can be done, but if practitioners find that results based solely on ideas do not generate

consistent, beneficial results, organizational development specialists need to look for more productive foundations for their work.

Cruickshank and Collins (2012) feel that in the absence of empirical evidence to support theoretical underpinnings to CM, models that are more readily applicable may have more value. In *The Fifth Discipline*, Senge (2005) speaks not of change management specifically, but of organizations as a whole, literally, an interconnected whole. Senge's work applies to the idea that other CM-focused researchers have called out—that a change made in one area of an organization will indeed touch other parts of the organization. Though a change in one area of an organization may have only a small degree of impact on other parts of an organization, there will, nonetheless be an impact. Few can argue the logic of this. Of all theories that may be applied to change management work, it seems most appropriate to apply those that have intrinsic reason, such as Senge's systems thinking. Theories that team members can understand, are more likely to be agreed with and used in CM efforts.

Components-based works in CM literature. Though Senge (2005) speaks of organizations as systems, they are nonetheless systems made up of individual parts. There is a great deal of research into change efforts in isolated areas of organizations. Research that focuses on one component of an organization and its specific help to CM efforts is most commonly found not in journals dedicated to change management but in those journals that are dedicated to specific aspects of an organization. IT, HR, and leadership are just a few of the examples of organizational components that have their own collections of research journals. CM research that is connected directly to specific organizational areas is most commonly found in the journals dedicated to these areas. Here are a few examples of this type of writing.

In a review of how a county transportation service found cost-saving measures, Harris (2010) focused on how two separate teams, leadership and training, worked together to benefit their organization. Fickenscher & Bakerman (2011) reported on the efforts of IT professionals in the process they would use to improve the IT component in a health-care services organization. Ruta (2005) provided a similarly concentrated look at change

being taken on in a human resources department. Another example of this type of CM research was of a change management effort for the facilities department of a large manufacturing operation (Voordijk, 2013). There are many examples of this type of article in the CM literature. As this type of work is more concerned with helping specific industries rather than the field of organizational development as a whole, one might consider this type of work to be of limited value to OD, but thinking this way would not be wise.

Articles that inform on lessons learned from CM work within specific elements of an organization can still be informative to the larger field. Reviewing CM work in specific organizational areas has at least two benefits. One benefit of reviewing work done in specific areas of an organization is that it gives those not in these areas of the organization eyes into the unique concerns of that part of the operation. Added information can foster greater understanding for areas of an organization in which one does not typically work. Another benefit of reviewing CM work done in a specific area of an organization is that it highlights new possibilities and approaches for CM work that a reader may not have otherwise thought of. For these reasons, those who are interested in doing the best they can in CM work should want to explore the CM experiences of others as much as possible.

Speaking not in terms of a departmental or functional roll, but in terms of targets for change, Schermerhorn, Osborn, Uhl-Bien, & Hunt (2012) identified eight “change targets” that CM leaders should look to when planning for and initiating change within an organization. Three components—purpose, objectives, and technology—are more the type to be set by organizational leaders. The five other components of an organization identified by Schermerhorn are strategy, structure, culture, tasks, and people. Others have also voiced this same key for CM success. Church and Rotola (2013), for example, though they did not speak specifically of Schermerhorn’s five elements in their writing, understood and espoused the importance of involving multiple parts of an organization in a CM effort.

Case study-based works in CM literature. Case study work is another category of work in the CM literature database. Similar to the writing discussed in the previous section, case studies are documented to help organizational development professionals learn from the experiences of other individuals and other organizations. With this goal in mind, Bamford and Daniel (2005) documented the experiences of one department's change efforts within the National Healthcare System (NHS), a prominent organization in the United Kingdom. Their intent was to study changes this group experienced in order to identify recommendations that could be useful for those managing change in other organizations. Harris (2010) had a similar motive in documenting the use of cross-functional teams to help improve efficiency in another organization. Though the effort was initiated in response to funding cuts in the public transportation system that he studied, Harris found a longer-term benefit to the organization due to the changes proposed by the cross-functional teams. Cited earlier in this chapter, Schlosser (2013) is a third example of a case study in the CM literature. Learning about the strategies reported by Schlosser and other case studies like this can provide insight for other CM professionals to use as they go about their own CM work.

Case studies about organizations that experience positive results in their change efforts are not the only case studies found in CM literature. Case studies that report change failures can also be informative. Drawing lessons from one such less successful CM effort was McClellan (2011). Referred to earlier in this chapter, McClellan's investigation is a case study. McClellan's investigation of a college of art and design focused on organizational member discourse during a change effort. He found that in not giving faculty and staff sufficient input on a change process, challenges in the change process arose that may otherwise have been prevented. Raelin and Catoldo (2011) is another case study discussed earlier in this review. Both of these studies highlight the fact that there can be overlap in categorizations. In fact, these two studies could be placed in three of the four categories. Both studies are (1) case studies that (2) focus on people, and (3) focus on a specific part of an organization. McClellan's work reminds university-based CM strategists to not forget the faculty (a seemingly obvious issue) while Raelin

and Cataldo emphasize the importance of leveraging middle managers in CM work. Regardless of the lesson learned, the volume of case studies found in CM literature makes it clear that this use of case study research and review is instructive for both education and application purposes.

Summarizing the Literature

A review of the literature reveals three common themes:

Leadership. Though many articles and research reports have different focal areas, numerous works touch on leadership as a key element in successful change management. Whether the author's point is to document the importance of active leadership involvement (Harris, 2010), the role of mid-level leadership compared to executive-level leadership (Raelin & Catalod, 2011), the need for leaders to set direction (Boga & Ensari, 2009) or any one of a number of other points, the conclusion of each is the same: the chance for any change effort to result in lasting transformational change is closely tied to the seniority and activity level of the sponsoring leadership. The higher the level of leadership involved and the more active they are in the change effort, the more likely a change effort will "set" (Bamford & Daniel, 2005; Cilliers, 2000).

Interconnectedness. Organizations are made up of multifaceted, interconnected structures. In most cases, a change made in one area of an organization will likely affect other parts of the organization. Though this notion of all things being connected is not new to ancient native cultures, the application of this idea to organizational development work is relatively recent. Senge (2005) is one whose work is most noted in this field of inquiry. Research and reviews of CM work in specific organizational areas typically calls out the need to watch for impact in other areas of an organization (Ruta, 2005; Fickenscher & Bakerman, 2013; Voordijk, 2013). Senge reminds us that this should be a regular consideration for all CM leaders. Schermerhorn et al. (2012) discuss specific interconnected parts of an organization that should be considered in change management efforts.

Schermerhorn et al. (2012) identified eight components of organizations. Though three of the five targets are more set by leaders (Purpose, Short-Term Objectives, and IT), the five remaining elements (Strategy, Structure, Culture, Tasks, and People) are very much a part of (or should be a part of) CM planning. CM leaders who understand the interplay of each of these elements within an organization and utilize this dynamic for organizational improvement will have a better chance of success in their work. In speaking of how to create lasting change for diversity and inclusion in an organization, Church and Rotolo (2013) put it this way: “This means integrating every aspect of diversity and inclusion into traditional development and feedback processes and tools such as performance management, leadership competencies, and 360 feedback, organizational surveys, workgroup climate assessments, talent scorecards, and internal talent deployment efforts” (p. 246). What Senge and Church and Rotolo find makes sense for any organization looking to create long-term transformational change.

Organizational member engagement. Leadership and interconnected components of any organization necessarily involves organizational members. The emphasis being brought to the forefront here is, for the best chance of success, change efforts must involve team members not just as a *part* of the process, but as fully adopting, fully engaged participants in the change effort. The less this is the case during a change effort, the more likely the change effort will not succeed. As discussed earlier in this chapter, this was a truth found by many CM writers and researchers (McClellan, 2013; Raelin and Cataldo, 2013; Schlosser, 2013).

Summarizing the major themes from this review; at a minimum, lasting transformational change requires the following elements:

1. Committed leadership
2. Involvement of multiple organizational elements
3. Full organizational member buy-in and engagement

Utilizing these concepts leads to a whole-system way of thinking not unlike that spoken of by Senge (2005). Change management efforts that draw upon all three of these

elements together in both the planning and performance of the work will have the best chance at achieving lasting transformational change; in other words, change that sticks.

A Whole-System Approach to Change Management

Teaching a Whole-System Change Management Approach

A first step in teaching anyone anything is to provide a foundation for the knowledge they are to learn. In the present context, this means presenting information provided in the previous section. Those intending to lead organizational change must recognize that no change has a chance at long-term success unless the three necessities that were identified in the literature are addressed. The three necessities in order for change to stick are (1) leadership that is committed to the change, (2) change-related activities that are “embedded” in the organization, and (3) full team member buy-in and engagement. Given the frequency of case study review in the CM literature, a teaching methodology that employs case studies seems natural for the profession.

According to Nilson (2010), the case study method of instruction is a valuable and proven tool for educational purposes. In an earlier work, Dunne and Brooks (2004) wrote extensively about the use of case studies for instruction. They found that one of the greatest advantages to using this method is that it allows learners to use low-risk situations to gain experience with high-potential principles and methods. Dunne and Brooks further find that through case study exercises, learners develop skills in the specific areas:

- Problem solving
- Analytical tools, quantitative and/or qualitative, depending on the case
- Decision making in complex situations
- Coping with ambiguities

This set of skills closely aligns with the people skills Levasseur (2005) speaks of that will be developed as CM leaders involve team members in change efforts. This is another reason case study method is recommended as a strategy for teaching how to create lasting transformational change in organizations. According to Nilson (2010), there are

many types of case studies. One type of case study is the open-ended, “complete the picture” type exercise. Another form of case study is “review what happened.” Here, the former type of case study is exemplified. Consider the following case with its accompanying questions:

Marshall Academy Prep School opened in 1980 initially intended for 500 students. It now has an enrollment of 1,500. The original school building is now surrounded by temporary structures. Some teachers have room assignments everywhere on the grounds, and many of the rooms are either too small or too old to appropriately accommodate students. The supervising counsel has decided it is time to build a new school. To save money, they have decided to build the new school on the existing school grounds. Though there are a number of less-experienced teachers, many teachers have worked there for over twenty years.

- Considering the five organizational components listed in Schermerhorn (2010) and the six forms of team member engagement listed earlier in this chapter, develop for each organizational component a set of strategies and actions to take in the preparation of a successful building fund drive and building changeover.
- Consider resistance that might be encountered in this effort and how to address this.

Applying a Whole-System Change-Management Approach

Multiple experiences in practicing the whole-system approach as outlined above will prepare CM leaders for applying this approach in the field. Change management leaders may consider the following format as one possible approach to their planning:

Components to Alter/Address and Actions for Leaders and Team Members

Note: Set components include Organizational Purpose, Short-Term Objectives, Existing Technology

<u>Actions for Leaders and Team Members</u>	<u>Strategy</u> <i>Operational plans</i>	<u>Structures</u> <i>Organizational design</i>	<u>Culture</u> <i>Core beliefs and values</i>	<u>Tasks</u> <i>Job designs for people and teams</i>	<u>People</u> <i>Recruit and selection steps</i>
Education					
Communication					
Participation					
Involvement					
Facilitation					
Support					

After each of these areas has been sufficiently addressed, CM leaders can then put together a plan to carry out the identified actions within each area. CM leaders who employ a well-thought-out plan that address all of the components of an organization given in the above table and involve leaders and team members in at least the six ways, also listed in the table, will have the best chance at realizing lasting transformational change – organizational change that sticks.

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