

Organizational Change through Influencing Individual Change

A behavior centric approach to change

Organizational change can be described as numerous individuals undergoing a similar change process at the same time. Each individual will be making choices relative to her personal situation and the culture that binds the group together. While there may be large sub-groups with similar beliefs and values there will also be some individuals that are outside the norm of any particular sub-group. And each sub-group will be sufficiently different from the others as to require special consideration for the change effort. Similarly, there will be individuals at all stages of readiness to change, each requiring a different effort for motivating them to the next stage of change. Therefore, the organizational change effort needs to be approached as a process of identifying the individual sub-groups with different decision-making processes and readiness to change. Each identifiable sub-group will require a change process tailored to the needs of the individuals within the group. Common throughout this change effort is the continuing focus on behavior, what drives it and what factors can be leveraged to cause a change from the existing behavior to another that is desired by the intervener.

1 – Internal to the individual

Search for understanding of decision-making process that determines behavior

Employ the means-end theory (Appendix A) to identify the cognitive processes employed in exhibiting behavior relative to individually held values and beliefs and the expected consequences for choosing a particular behavior among the choices available.

2 – External to the individual

TTM/SOC study to search for leverage points for possibly influencing behavior

Employ the Transtheoretical Model (TTM, aka SOC – Stages of Change) of change motivation and the Lewin/Schein change theory (Appendix B) to identify readiness and motivation for a change in behavior.

3 – External interventions acting on decision-making processes

Hypothesis testing of ability to influence change through purposeful interventions

This is action research that not only tests hypotheses based on earlier learning, but continually validates earlier findings. In this cycle, diagnosis and intervention are not separate processes, but are closely intertwined with learning as an iterative process. Any initial diagnosis is only a starting point to identify possible interventions. These later interventions provide the arena for the real learning since they provide a basis for testing

the dynamic relationships that are likely to drive the exhibited behavior. Schein (1995) called this process diagnostic intervention. This also recognizes the potential effect the researcher has just by initiating a diagnostic interview.

The interview process itself will change the system and the nature of that change will provide some of the most important data about how the system works. i.e. will respondents be paranoid and mistrusting, open and helpful, supportive of each other or hostile in their comments about each other, cooperative or aloof, and so on. (Schein, 1995, p. 32)

This response also provides some insight into how the individual may respond to later interventions, which is important to know when planning the later interventions. “The flow of a change or managed learning process then is one of continuous diagnosis as one is continuously intervening” (p. 36). In addition to focusing on behaviors, the institutional structure can be examined and altered to eliminate the barriers that are limiting change or to encourage the enablers for change to occur.

Stages of Change (Transtheoretical Model)

The change model presented here is the Transtheoretical Model (TTM) coupled with key components of Lewin’s Change Theory (see Appendix B). This approach to organizational change focuses attention on the individual with the assumption that organizational change is the collective change of many individuals along the same path. Because many are not familiar with these theories of organizational change, the change model will be described in some detail, including implications for the research processes and the implementation design.

This model of change was developed by Prochaska and DiClemente through the comparative analysis of 18 major psychotherapy and behavioral change theories, hence, the name transtheoretical (Brown, 1999). From this analysis came the identification of ten change processes that were employed with different emphasis by each major theory and applied with different weighting of experiential and environmental interventions. They also identified five stages through which individuals progress in the change process. As will be seen, there is a close relationship between these stages and those identified by Lewin’s theory of how change occurs in individuals (see Appendix B).

Stages of Change

These are simple definitions with some information on how the stage might be identified through the behavior exhibited while in that stage of change.

- Precontemplation – “You are in a state of benign ignorance where you think what you don’t know won’t hurt you” (Booth-Butterfield, 1996). The situation is totally outside the individual’s frame of awareness or outside their perceived need. Therefore, there is no problem because there is no awareness of the situation as it might pertain to them. Obviously, there is no intention to change at this stage and defenses may be raised if pushed to change.
- Contemplation – Some level of awareness of the problem has been attained and the individual is starting to search for more information. While the search may not be very active or focused, there is some willingness to learn more. There is some knowledge of the benefits, but a large degree of fear of the unknown and the amount of work that may be needed. These feelings lead to procrastination. If forced to change, defenses remain in place leading to compliance that is not lasting. The individual may welcome assistance in clarifying cost/benefit trade-offs and suggestions on how to change.
- Preparation – A decision has been made for future action, but the individual is not yet prepared to actually take the action now. Additional thought is needed on the individual steps that need to be taken prior to the new behavior being attempted. Seeing peers in the precontemplation and contemplation stages (80% of others in many research samples) can cause discouragement and questioning of their decision to take action. Culture plays a further function in reinforcing the role implicit assumptions have in perpetuating the status quo.
- Action – “Just do it.” The new behavior is tried and may be continued for awhile. However, old habits and tendencies toward the old behavior are still in place and a relapse to the old behavior is quite likely. A key part of the TTM model of change is recognition that change does not happen once, but requires recurring attempts. Each time a relapse to old behavior occurs there is another learning occasion for identifying the environmental cues to old behavioral patterns. In these cases additional preparation is needed.
- Maintenance – What had been the old behavioral habit has been replaced by the new behavior. Planning and thinking about the new behavior is no longer necessary as the behavior becomes more automatic. The benefits of the change are being realized and confidence is building on the ability to continue with the change in behavior. However, in times of stress or unusual environmental conditions a reversion to the old behavior is still likely. This is because only the normal or routine environmental cues that triggered the old behavior have been altered or the past reaction replaced with new behavior. However, not all triggering cues that may be possible will have been altered, creating the possibility for a shift to an earlier stage in an abnormal situation not yet addressed in the change process to the new behavior. Again, reversion to old habits is not a failure of the change process, but the identification of another behavioral cue that needs to be addressed. The goal of maintenance is not necessarily action but relapse prevention.

Where should the change process be started?

Many people might assume that the way to bring about change is to advocate their position vigorously while showing others why or how their assumptions are flawed. This example of linear thinking encourages change agents to respond to resistance with greater and greater force. It is counterintuitive to people operating from these assumptions that schismogenetic processes limit the effectiveness of their advocacy. Indeed, the greater the force they use to advocate a shift in values, the more they mobilize forces determined to retain existing values. An argument for change creates an escalating conflict in which the existing culture has an established, strong position. (Ramsey, 2001, p. 55)

The answer then is to start at whatever stage the individual is at and not to expect them to be as ready to change as you are to have them change. A problem is that too often change programs start with the focus on the action step, expecting the change to occur with a forceful call to action. When that fails, there is an attempt to take a step back and help the individual get prepared for the action step of making the change. But even here, there is the possibility that the individual may be at either of the two earlier stages of change and any effort will be wasted because the intervention will not match the needs of the individual at their point in the change process.

Change Processes

The 10 change processes that make up the TTM/SOC change model are:

- Consciousness raising – becoming aware of the nature and negative implications of certain behaviors. This includes an awareness of others having made such a change and the actions that were taken.
- Social liberation – Providing more alternatives and resources to assist in the change process. This not only provides assistance but increases the relative benefits of the change and possibly increasing the costs through changing the consequences of the old behavior.
- Dramatic relief or emotional arousal – Identification, experiencing, and expression of emotions related to the consequences associated with the behavior. The desired emotional response may range from inspiration for successful change to increasing fear for maintaining the existing behavior.
- Self-reevaluation – Personal reflection on the existing behavior and the desired change relative to “one’s identity, happiness, and success” (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001, p. 250).
- Stimulus control – Altering the surroundings to remove stimuli that trigger the undesirable behavior. New stimuli may be established to elicit the new behavior and/or inhibit the old behavior.
- Self-liberation or commitment – Personal commitment to both their ability to change and their follow through.
- Counter conditioning or substituting – Finding and employing new behaviors that can be substituted for the undesirable behavior. New mental models may also be used to alter the way the behavior is cognitively related to other things.

- Environment reevaluation or social reappraisal – Understanding the cultural implications of the behavior and the opinions of others whose opinions are valued.
- Reinforcement management or rewards – Finding the internal and external rewards that are contingently available to support the probability of the new behavior occurring or continuing.
- Helping relationships or supporting – Providing emotional support, moral guidance, or simply serving as a sounding board for someone undergoing a change process.

Points of intervention within the different Stages of Change

Because each stage of change is different from the others it is important to customize the recruitment procedure for identifying those in the stage. It is also important to focus on the leverage points that will move the individual to the next stage and to minimize the potential for regression to an earlier stage.

- Precontemplation – The focus needs to be on creating an awareness of the need to change. An emphasis can be placed on the costs associated with maintaining the existing behavior or the benefits derived from change. The objective is not to create a tipping point for change, but to establish some awareness that such costs and benefits exist. This effort must be accomplished within the individual's existing mental models that have been established to support the existing behavior.
- Contemplation – The awareness of the need to change is rudimentary and the focus needs to be shifted to increasing the perceived benefits of the change and reducing the expected or perceived costs of changing. Effort continues to the tipping point where the expected benefits outweigh the expected costs of the change. To get to this point it may be necessary to help further clarify both the benefits (which may be unknown) and costs (which may be unrecognized).
- Preparation – Self-efficacy needs to be nurtured. This may involve exposure to developmental material such as books, articles, videos, etc. It may also involve participation at formal training sessions, workshops, or seminars. Competency and self-assurance can be strengthened through practice and possibly role-playing.
- Action – Reinforcement is needed through coaching and mentoring. Successes need to be recognized even if the success is only the attempt with results not yet evident.
- Maintenance – Positive feedback and encouragement is needed to overcome possible negative feedback or slowness of results to be evident. Failures need to be positioned as areas needing additional learning to overcome past habits previously established for the behaviors being replaced.

Appendix A – Means-end Theory of decision-making

This theory was developed by the work of Reynolds and Gutman over the last three decades (Reynolds & Olson, 2001). This research effort and application focused attention on consumer purchasing behavior and how such behavior might be influenced. In the research here, the focus is shifted to the retailer behavior instead of consumer behavior. However, the fundamental idea remains that all behavior is determined by a decision-making process that evaluates the benefits associated with different courses of action. This evaluation process involves the mental models that have developed as the individual learns to relate to her environment. To be effective at changing behavior requires more than being able to predict the occurrence of the behavior. It involves understanding

- what criteria are important to the decision and
- why the criteria are important to the individual.

The theory name comes from identifying the means that are employed by the individual to attain their desired end state or goal. The determination of these linkages are researched through a laddering technique where the researcher starts at the behavior and questions in more detail back to the reasons for the behavior and eventually back to the values and goals that are at the root of the behavior.

Earlier roots of the means-end theory can be traced to expected value theory, which is an economic view of decision making that focuses attention on the benefits and costs associated with the expected outcome from a decision. This foundation has been combined with cognitive psychology that investigates learning and how associative networks and levels of abstraction are formed and processed. While different means-end models have been proposed, the most elementary involves three steps.

Attributes → Consequences → Values

Further detail has the consequences split into functional and psychological components. An even more complex model has the attributes being subdivided into concrete and abstract attributes and the values being divided into current values and lifetime values. In all the models though, the attributes associated with the decision is a means to the end associated with the values. This chain of connections also is hierarchical moving from concrete attributes to the more abstract values.

To provide some structure for the research, four fundamental issues need clarification to fully frame the decision-making process.

- Segmentation of the population into groups that share some common characteristic. This grouping would not only focus on the mental models involved in the means-end process for decision-making, but would also include the different stages of change in the TTM change model (see Appendix B). Other factors can be combined with the segmentation to identify the desired segments that might be targeted in the decision focus.
- Decision focus concerns the behaviors that are most relevant to the problem being studied. This is from the researcher or intervener perspective and concentrates on the actions that are intended to influence a target's behavior. Questions that arise concern where new behaviors might fit within the mix of

existing behaviors. What is the behavior that is desired? How does this fit into the context of the decisions that have been made or need to be made?

- A behavior occurs within a specific decision context. This context includes the physical setting and the social environment (the influence of other people, especially friends and family). Other influencing factors include socioeconomic strata, social roles, life style, and cultural background. To some extent the context is also shaped by past learning experiences that form the mental models within which decisions are made.
- Typically only two or three choice alternatives are considered for a decision. This creates two sub-issues. First is how the alternatives are selected and second, what criteria (and their importance) are used to make the final decision. Importance may be driven by personal decision involvement, attitudes, values, commitment, and past experiences.

Putting the above theory into practice establishes the methodology that can be employed to understand how critical decisions are made. These steps in the laddering discussion include the following items.

- Frame the decision-making within a problem orientation. This focuses attention on the needs or goals (desired end state) or current deficiencies (gap between the current and the desired state).
- Decisions are made based upon the consequences that are expected from making the decision to adopt a particular behavior. These are the anticipated benefits deriving from the decision and extend well beyond the surface attributes involved in the decision. This linkage between behavior and consequence may be very deliberate or it may occur at a subconscious level based upon operational mental models that are tied to beliefs and values. The key is to focus on the consequences that drive the decision toward achieving a particular goal or possibly a subgoal of a larger, overall goal. An appeal to consequences has more leverage for change than an appeal to values since the decision balances on expected outcomes or consequences with values being more removed and abstract.
- Further clarification of consequences can be done along two dimensions. First is the identification of the consequence as having positive or negative connotations. A second classification can be as functional or psychological consequence. This identifies the driver of the consequence. Functional consequences are those that are tangible and directly related to the experience that is likely to result from the decision. Psychological consequences are more intangible and relate to the psychological and social aspects associated with the decision. Aspects of the functional consequence or even the behavior itself can be reflected in the psychological consequences.
- Linkages or connections are the cause-effect relationships that exist between the attributes, functional consequences, psychological consequences, and values or goals. These linkages carry the meaning from the values and goals to the behavior.
- Personal relevance concerns the consequences that are most tied to a person's major life goals and core values. This starts to establish a hierarchy of

consequences that reflects the relative importance of the consequence to the decision-making process.

Attributes, by themselves, do not have consequences. It is only through behavior that that the consequences can be experienced. The attributes cannot then be examined in isolation, but must be studied relative to how they impact the behavioral processes. Aspects of the behavior itself may even have an impact on the consequences experienced.

Appendix B – Lewin/Schein’s Change Theory

Kurt Lewin theorized a three-stage model of change that has come to be known simply as the unfreezing-change-refreeze model. The significance of this theory was the positioning of individual and organizational change within the context of psychological processes that requires prior learning to be rejected and replaced with a new foundation. Edgar Schein provided further detail for a more comprehensive model of change that will be described here. As an approach to organizational change Schein (1999) called this approach cognitive redefinition. “If you have been trained to think in a certain way and are a member of a group that thinks the same way, how can you imagine changing to a new way of thinking?” (p. 126).

Stage 1 – becoming motivated to change (unfreezing)

This phase of the change model is built on the observation that human behavior is based on a psychological equilibrium where multiple forces established by past observational learning and cultural influences tend to maintain the current behavior. Change requires adding new forces of change or the removal of some of the existing factors that are at play in perpetuating the behavior. Schein (1995) identified this unfreezing process as being three sub-processes that relate to a readiness and motivation to change.

- Disconfirmation where present conditions lead to dissatisfaction, such as not meeting personal goals. This requires that the cause of the dissatisfaction to not only be identified, but accepted as a valid cause for the feelings of dissatisfaction. This may require acceptance of something that had been personally or culturally discounted or denied. The larger the gap between what is believed and what needs to be believed for change to occur, the more likely the new information will be ignored. If the change effort is seen as inevitable, denial shifts to resistance and the insistence that the change takes place elsewhere. This is where passive-aggressive behavior is likely to be exhibited (McIluff & Coghlan, 2000). Any required unlearning needs to take place prior to attempting new learning. In this way motivation to change is driven by something that is valued or closely associated with a belief. Disconfirmation would be a key factor when moving from the TTM precontemplation stage to the contemplation stage.
- Anxiety or guilt builds from previous beliefs now being seen as invalid. Schein (1999, p. 116) called this “survival anxiety” as in “I will not survive in some sense unless I change.” Guilt is described as “I will not achieve my own ideals and aspirations unless I change.” Charismatic leaders may be capable of being convincing enough to create survival anxiety. This requires communicating the essential elements in an understandable manner (see Jensen, 1996 & Appendix C). Even in cases where someone appears to be self-motivated for change, there may be an underlying internal discomfort that is driving the need for change to meet either personal goals or ideals. However, survival anxiety or guilt may not be sufficient to prompt change to occur if learning anxiety is present.
- Learning anxiety is the form of anxiety that triggers defensiveness and resistance due to the pain of having to unlearn what had been previously accepted mental model. This unlearning process can create feelings of incompetence, loss of

identity relative to the alignment between beliefs and actions, or punishment for being incompetent. To a significant degree there is also a cultural component that drives group membership. Anxiety may develop if the change may call for the individual to alter the relationships they have with different groups of individuals. This involves both personal identity and peer recognition. To overcome learning anxiety it is necessary to establish a psychological safety net. Temporary incompetence needs to be seen as acceptable without fear of punishment. Group reassurance is also needed to reflect a desired change in cultural norms. Schein (1999, p. 123) identified three stages that occur in response to learning anxiety.

- Denial – the disconfirming information is not valid and should be discounted.
- Scapegoating, passing the buck, and dodging – the problem exists elsewhere and therefore must be changed someplace else.
- Maneuvering and bargaining – special consideration should be given for making the effort to change, since you are the individual being inconvenienced. Or a subconscious cry for additional convincing that the change really is in your best long-term interest after all.

For change to progress to the second stage it is necessary to move past the possible anxieties. This can be accomplished in two ways.

First is to have the survival anxiety or guilt be greater than the learning anxiety. This might be accomplished through raising the anxiety level through emphasis on survival or guilt issues. This forces the decision-maker to move into learning since the anxiety from that arena is less. Unfortunately it may also increase defenses to avoid learning further. In an alternate, preferred approach, the learning anxiety could be reduced through addressing the learning processes that might be involved. This focuses on creating psychological safety for learning. Schein (1999) identified eight ways that can be employed to ease the individual into the learning that is necessary for change to occur. These can be employed as specific interventions to move the change process forward.

- Build a compelling vision of what the future might be if change were to occur. This vision must be well articulated and shared as widely as possible.
- Formal training in the learning competencies that are deficient. While Schein (1999) did not specifically mention organizational learning, all the learning disciplines identified in Senge (1990) would be applicable here.
- Personal control over the learning process by the learner. This involves determining the learning objectives, the method of learning, and the pace at which learning progresses.
- The training or learning agenda should be focused on the entire group of individuals who may be involved. If the training were limited to only a few individuals there would not be the cultural support necessary to maintain the learning process or to assist in change maintenance.
- Training resources and safe harbors are necessary to not only permit the trial-and-error that frequently occurs in learning, but the freedom to risk making mistakes. This involves not only the time and expense that may be necessary but the feedback mechanism that allows for learning from mistakes and the ability to test alternate solutions.

- Positive role models are necessary to support observational learning. In this type of learning the actions and attitudes of others can be used as a substitute for actual personal experience. This speeds up the learning process by replacing trial-and-error methods with what might be termed best practices.
- Support groups or communities of practice can be established to provide both group support for making changes and group learning experiences. These groups are a combination of peer learning, encourager, and problem solver rolled into a support mechanism.
- Reward and organizational structures that are aligned to the desired state. This is very broad and covers the many ways change might be encouraged and barriers to change eliminated.

Schein (1999) claimed that all eight conditions are essential for successful change programs.

The key to effective change management, then, becomes the ability to balance the amount of threat produced by disconfirming data with enough psychological safety to allow the change target to accept the information, feel the survival anxiety, and become motivated to change. (Schein, 1995, p. 10)

The energy and resources necessary to establish this type of change program are offset by the increased likeliness of success. When comparing to the TTM stages of change model, this learning anxiety would be a likely component of the preparation stage.

Stage 2 – change what needs to be changed (unfrozen and moving to a new state)

Once there is sufficient dissatisfaction with the current conditions and a real desire to make some change exists, it is necessary to identify exactly what needs to be changed, if not already articulated in the first stage. At this stage it is critical to have a clear definition of the desired state that is to occur after change is accomplished. Schein (1995) discussed this process within the context of cognitive restructuring or redefinition. Through processing new information there are three possible impacts.

- Semantic redefinition – words take on new or expanded meaning.
- Cognitive broadening – a concept is interpreted within a broader context.
- Revised standards of comparison and judgment – there is an adjustment in the scale used in evaluating new input relative to what had previously been learned and accepted as factual.

Without a concise view of the new state, it is not possible to clearly identify all the facets of the gap that exists between the present state and that being proposed. To some extent, this picks up some of the preparation stage in the TTM model of change plus all of the action stage. As in the earlier stage, there are a number of activities that can be adopted as an aid in transitioning into the act of making the change.

- Imitation of role models. This is within the realm of observational learning where the actions, attitudes, or beliefs of someone else are recognized as being different from what had been personally accepted. This psychological identification with someone else provides not only a source of disconfirming information, but a model that can be adopted. In seeking role models, unfreezing establishes a motivation to learn or change, but does not necessarily provide a controlled or predictable direction that the learning may go. Therefore, in planned change

initiatives it may be necessary to provide role models that are exemplary of the desired change. Mentors are a specific mechanism for providing a role model for a new entrant to an organization. While role models are a quick and efficient process for modeling new behavior, it does require the individual's personality and cultural setting to fully match that of the role model. Otherwise, the changes that are made may only be temporary as the role model becomes to be seen as deficient along one or more dimensions. Therefore, a preferred solution may be having the individual create her own personalized solution through scanning in lieu of providing a predetermined role model that may not fit her needs. Schein (1995) said that imperfect identification with the change consultant may be one reason so many change efforts fail.

- Scanning is looking for personalized solutions through trial-and-error learning. This process can be seen as a normal part of group socialization or other learning situations where change is underway, but the end state is not clearly identifiable. Schein (1995) called this scanning, which includes the search for additional information, which incorporates the key learning components of the TTM contemplation and preparation stages.

Stage 3 – making the change permanent (refreezing)

Refreezing is the final stage where the action becomes habitual. This requires behavior that is consistent with other behaviors and the values and beliefs held by the individual. In comparing to the TTM stages of change, this would be the maintenance stage. Key components of maintaining the new behavior include:

- Developing a new self-concept and identity. As mentioned above, behaviors established through scanning provide a better foundation for successful change than changes based solely on identification with a specific role model.
- Establishing the new behavior in interpersonal relationships. Because the culture within which the individual lives has such an influence on the reinforcement of either the old or new behavior it is often desirable to work with a larger group that can support each other through the change process. This also allows the ability to focus attention on those remaining individuals or environmental factors that might be limiting the change becoming permanent.

In many ways Lewin's theory of change, including the enhancements contributed by Schein, can be seen as very similar to the TTM (stages of change model). Lewin/Schein focus on the processes involved at each stage while the TTM focuses attention on the transition from one stage to the next. In this regard, the two theories of change complement each other to provide the practitioner additional assistance in promoting and driving a planned change effort.

Appendix C – Jensen’s communication for change management

One application of the dialectic change process is in Jensen’s (1996) approach to self-managed change. His five questions are central to communicating the need to change and are designed to motivate individuals toward change without a centralized, planned change effort.

Why change? How is the change relevant to what I do?

What do you want me to do differently? What’s the priority?

How will you measure me and what are the consequences?

What tools and support will I get?

What’s in it for me? For us? (p. 34)

However, using these questions still requires some level of leadership to direct the crafting of the message for change and the necessary follow through to encourage the change and remove barriers as necessary. In this manner, there is a component of planning that is required. Without this consistency of message and action there is a gap of performance called the “Descartes Change Management, ‘I communicated it, therefore it is’” (p. 39). Behavior is determined by past and current decisions made by an individual. Knowledge of this decision making process through the means-end theory (see Appendix A) permits the identification of where change communication might be directed. However, it is necessary to know the predisposition of the individual to hear the message for change. The Transtheoretical Model of change helps in crafting the message for change in a manner that matches the message to the individual’s readiness for change.

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