

BECOMING (AND BEING) A CHANGE AGENT: PERSONAL TRANSFORMATION AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

RUTHANNE HUISING
Sloan School of Management
Massachusetts Institute of Technology

ABSTRACT

This paper examines how employees - accountants, production supervisors, information technology managers, and engineers - come to participate actively in organizational change initiatives. Research on champions or change agents typically examines the behaviors, attributes, and motivations of the individual leading the organizational change. As such, "championing" is understood as a near heroic venture by those with a near innate ability and expressed interest in such work. However, change leaders generally rely on the support of a team of employees and consultants. The experience of the members of change teams is less well understood despite their role in introducing, legitimating, and managing change among the rank and file of the organization. Interviews with full-time members of change teams reveal that they do not begin as skilled, motivated agents of change but rather they undergo extensive training and, in many cases, describe themselves as having experienced a personal transformation during their intense involvement in the change activities. The process of becoming an agent of change is analyzed using business process management as a case of organizational change. The findings suggest that organizations, in the pursuit of change, produce change agents and that these change agents seek opportunities in the labor market that allow them to continue this work - initiating, championing, and implementing business process management - in other organizations.

Keywords: Organizational Change, Change Agents, Careers

Please do not cite or distribute

Introduction

Change in the nature of work, employment relations, and career patterns is well documented (Osterman 1999). Programs or ideas for changing how work is organized and governed such as matrix organizations (Barlett and Ghoshal 1990), quality circles (Lawler and Mohrman 1985), reengineering (Hammer and Champy 1993), and high performance work systems (Rubinstein and Kochan 2001) acknowledge the increased importance of knowledge as both an input and a product and leverage new technologies that facilitate the processing and distribution of information (Drucker 1993, Zuboff 1988). Flexibility, decentralized decision-making, team structures, empowerment, market-based compensation, horizontal mobility, and distributed information processing characterize the post-industrial workplace (Powell 2001). These changes in organizational structures and behaviors are attributed to technological advances or environmental shifts such as globalization, sectoral shifts, or regulatory changes (Barnett and Carroll 1995).

Cross-organization studies of change have addressed the macro rationales of diffusion and subsequent isomorphism found in organizational fields (Edelman 1990, Fligstein 1991, Dobbin & Sutton 1998 for example). These studies have identified macro-mechanisms that support organizational adoption and thus adaptation including legal changes and professional networks. However, very little is known about how about the local mechanisms and dynamics of organizational change and attempts “to document the behaviors and decision-making processes that underwrite diffusion are virtually non-existent, and yet are particularly critical” (Barley and Tolbert 1997). Regardless of the cause of organizational change, the selected change, the new

strategy, design, or program, must undergo a process of legitimization and diffusion within and outside the organization. That is, change must be introduced, legitimated, and managed at multiple levels. New strategies and designs must be made compelling in order that key employees and managers commit to marshalling and implementing the change.

I examine the micro processes involved in the intra-organizational diffusion of a particular organizational change. Business process management, formerly known as reengineering, is a means of redesigning work, relationships and authority in an organization from being functionally-based to being process-based. I use business process management as a case or instance of post-industrial organizational design that organizations continue to implement (Hammer 2001). Specifically I am interested in the process through which this selected change becomes a compelling ideological and emotional force in the lives of members of the change team. Interviews with change team members in ten organizations illuminate how they come to be involved in the change initiative, their role in the change process and their experience managing change. How do employees, the foot soldiers of organizational change, become involved, mobilized, and engaged in implementing organizational change?

The interviews reveal that members often do not begin as skilled, motivated agents but rather they undergo extensive training to become change agents. By attending business seminars, reading management texts, visiting other organizations undertaking similar change, and engaging in team discussions, the members collect the cultural resources needed throughout the change process. Although all members participate in a similar induction process, they experience this period of inculcation differently. For some members, business process redesign becomes

ideologically compelling. Further, these members describe a personal transformation caused by their intense involvement in the change. Their understanding of the organization's purpose and their own role and authority is altered. In addition, their conception of self and career is also transformed. These members come to center their career on initiating, championing, and implementing business process management in other organizations. The findings suggest that organizations, in the pursuit of change, produce agents of change and that these individuals seek opportunities in the labor market that allow them to continue their work.

Key Actors in Organizational Change

Understanding how organizations respond to and interact with their environment – competitive, technological, strategic – has surfaced the role of agents known as gatekeepers (Allen 1971), boundary spanners (Ancona and Caldwell 1990), entrepreneurs (Kanter 1983), and idea practitioners (Davenport et al 2003). These individuals are skilled at scanning, identifying, evaluating, and selecting potential solutions – ideas and technologies – located outside of the boundaries of the organization. Professional networks are an important resource for the diffusion of ideas and technologies (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Other agents in the environment, reality brokers (Brown 1978), change agents (Rogers 1983), Johnny Appleseeds (DiMaggio and Powell 1983), seek to shape or influence the adoption of ideas and technology, usually framed as innovation, by client organizations.

Within organizations, individuals working to socialize and implement ideas or technologies selected are referred to as champions (Schon 1963, Roberts 1988, Lawless and Price 1992, Day 1994, Markham 1998, 2000), entrepreneurs (Kanter 1989), or corporate entrepreneurs (Guth and Ginsberg 1990). Champions appropriate selected ideas or technologies and promote and

implement them within the organization. They mobilize power and attempt to influence the adoption of the organizational change. Their presence is an important factor in the success of technological adoption or innovation efforts (Roberts 1988, Frost and Egri 1991). The distinction between those who bring innovations into the firm and those that implement them is slightly blurred or complicated as a single person may act in both roles. These individuals may emerge as the lead champions, or principal champions (Day 1994), and be supporting in the effort by additional change agents not engaged in boundary spanning activities.

Much of the literature on these internal agents describes their attributes and behaviors. Change agents become immersed fronting and astutely pushing change as a result of their personality. It is these differentiating characteristics often create a particular image of a hero. Change agents are described as having strong communication and influencing skills, a keen sense of politics, and optimistic dispositions. A comparative analysis of the characteristics of champions and non-champions, finds significant psychological and behavior differences (Howell and Higgins 1990) and concludes that champion emergence is a function of “personality characteristics, transformational leadership behaviors, and frequency and variation of influence tactics.” (Howell and Higgins 1990 p 317). Change agents may also be appropriately situated in the organization to rally for change. Day (1994)¹ finds that both bottom-up and top-down champions are able to lead innovation efforts effectively in an organization. Top-down roles are more likely when the innovation is expensive, highly visible, and involve a significant change in strategy. A senior person will take on the dual role when the change is highly uncertain but not technological in kind. In other words, who should lead the change depends on the kind of change attempted.

¹ This research addresses the development and commercialization of products.

The activity of championing an innovation is often conceptualized as a political activity.

Thomas (1994) analyzes the complex political process in which groups with different interests struggle to maintain and expand their domain through the selection and implementation of a particular technology. Markham (2000) finds that change agents and their antagonists emerge in response to a new project's potential effect on their department or work rather than the technical merit of the project. Championing involves the ability to navigate the socio-political environment of the firm. In addition to the academic literature, there is a thriving practitioner's literature about how can managers identify, develop, and support champions or internal change leaders (Petrozzo and Stepper 1994). Change teams should include a balance of employees and consultants. These full-time members should be able to digest details, see the big picture, and be willing to get their hands dirty. In addition the selected members should be well respected or at a minimum not have a negative perception in the organization.

Another kind of internal change agent, the "tempered radical" (Meyerson and Scully 1995), provides a contrast to the formal, high profile role of the champion and highlight the power of ideological motivations. Tempered radicals "behave as committed and productive members (in their organization), and act as vital sources of resistance, alternative ideas, and transformation within their organization" (ibid p 586). These individuals experience a tension between their role in and commitment to the organization they work in and the dominant belief system or culture of that organization. The tension stems from an inconsistency between the organization's culture and values and personal identification with a cause, an ideology, or a community. The change and transformation discussed in the tempered radical literature focuses on "progressive" social change including making organizations a more comfortable place for women, minorities, gays

and lesbians, and parents or bringing to the fore environmental or labor issues. Despite the conflict between one's professional and personal life, these individuals are "radical" because they are committed to challenging the status quo in their organization and "tempered" because they are astute about how change, under such circumstances, occurs. They engage in constructive action, "small wins" (Weick 1984), to make space in the dominant culture for people like themselves.

Business Process Management as an example of organizational change

The process management logic changes the organization of work and roles of employees, managers and executives, the structure of the firm and the culture of work. The work done within a firm is conceptualized as a number of major processes and is reorganized from functional departments or silos into process teams. The process is designed to integrate goals of employees and refocus them on meeting the needs of the customer. The teams may work together over the long run on the same process. A group of workers that previously functioned separately will be integrated into a case team responsible for handling reoccurring requests or processes in a more efficient manner. Specialists on a portion of a process are retrained so that they may now work across the entire process as a case worker. Although process redesign initially focused on back office and clerical work, it is now moving up the chain to professional work. In addition, the role and power of managers and the functions are minimized. As functions fade into the background, processes emerge in their places; work, authority, and responsibility are reorganized from functions to processes. Overall it is an assault on the functional division of labor and is sometimes discussed as an attempt to "reverse the industrial revolution".

Process management questions the value of having work and organizations segmented by functions, also called silos or stove pipes, such as finance, marketing and sales, research and development. The work of a typical bureaucratic organization, divided into many narrow, task-focused jobs, is reorganized into a number of processes. A process is all the end-to-end work involved in providing a customer with something they value, an output for which a customer will pay. For example, filling a customer order involves employees who are fragmented across sales, credit, inventory, and shipping. Each of these employees works within a separate function or silo and this arrangement is described as being open to potential quality problems and inefficiencies due to the distribution of accountability and authority across the functions. Further these competing functions stifle creativity and innovation, are unresponsive to large changes in the environment, and obsessed with functional activity rather than results (Hammer and Champy 1993).

Research Methodology

Semi-structured interviews are used to collect data regarding the process of becoming involved in the change process. This is a work in progress. Thus far, I have interviewed eighteen persons: fifteen individuals who were selected by executives or senior managers to become involved in the development and implementation of a process-based organizational design; three individuals who work as consultants advising organizations in process redesign. Eight of the interviewees were identified by a business process educator who invited them to participate in the interviews. The remaining ten were found through referrals from the first round of interviewees. The interviews, 60 to 90 minutes long, were conducted by telephone.

The original goal of the interviews was to gather data about how the organization came to adopt business process redesign as a “solution” and the implications of the subsequent implementation. The interview included questions about the background of the interviewee and their perspective on the change. It was through these series of questions that interviewees began to open up an unanticipated topic - their experience of becoming change agents. Although I identify some of these people as moving through the full cycle of becoming a change agent, the interviewees do not refer to themselves as change agents. After completing four interviews during which this unexpected topic arose, the interview guide was expanded to collect additional information on the interviewee’s experience. The sampling method, given the original goal of the study, focused on variation in ownership structure, size and industry. The companies the interviewees worked for ranged from a global energy company to a local utility. This paper uses data from 18 interviews and presents preliminary findings. I continue to interview members of change teams and am sampling across organizations and individuals in order to maximize variance in the experience of change agents including those who are less committed, drop out, or do participate in subsequent projects.

I analyze the experience of the change team members as a series of stages – accepting, learning, experiencing, converting and diffusing – of becoming an agent of change. Members of change teams do not necessarily experience all of these stages. Some members are one time participants. They only progress as far as learning and do not become agents in the sense that they do not become involved in subsequent diffusion opportunities. Interviewees that participate in multiple change projects across one or more organizations are referred to as change agents. Some change agents discuss experiences of conversion or transformation while others do not.

The stages capture all of the experiences described by interviewees. In this paper I focus on those who experience all steps although subsequent analyses will include the other paths of becoming (or not) a change agent. Eight interviewees of fifteen fit into this pattern of becoming. Although I am also interested in how members of change team members are selected I have only limited anecdotal information and therefore condition my analysis on the member's selection and focus on the subsequent process of becoming.

The fifteen change team members are primarily male engineers at the director level. Six (40%) have full-time process roles such as VP Business Process Transformation or Process Owner. Two are independent consultants and the remaining seven (47%) are involved in process redesign while holding either a line or staff position in an organization. All of the interviewees continue to work on process redesign today; however, this is an artifact of the sampling approach used.

Current Role	Level	Education	Sex
Business process (6)	Vice President (2)	Business (3)	Male (11)
Line (5)	Director (9)	Engineering (7)	Female (4)
Staff (2)	Senior Manager (2)	Social Sciences (3)	
Consultant (2)	Own company (2)	Other (2)	
		Graduate (5)	
		Undergraduate (8)	
		Associate (2)	

The length of time that the interviewees have been familiar with and working with the idea of business process varies. For 6 interviewees (40%) this initial involvement occurred between 1990 and 1995, for another 6 interviewees (40%) this occurred between 1996 and 2000. The remaining three interviewees were introduced to the idea with in the last five years. Eleven interviewees (73%) were introduced to this change as members of a change team. Since this

initial introduction ten of the eleven (introduced as change team members), have gone on to lead process redesign initiatives in other organizations or other divisions of the introducing employer. Four of the fifteen (27%) became their business process experience as leaders of the organization's change team and never experienced being one of many change team members. More data about the interviewees' subsequent experiences and roles are presented in the findings section.

Findings (*preliminary*)

Selection

The criteria and process used by managers to identify potential participants in an organizational change process is an important stage; however, I have only limited anecdotal information.

Although I present this data briefly below, I condition my analysis on the member's selection and focus on the subsequent process of becoming.

In the literature on organizational change, change agents appear at the scene of an organizational change (Howell and Higgins 1990). However, I find that potential change agents are identified and selected by executives or change leaders and asked to join the change initiatives. Although executives offer an individual from their function to participate, the selection process can be a protracted, high-level negotiation. A change leader explained that an executive identified a member that the change leader did not feel was "appropriate" for the change team:

"I fought with this guy for a couple of weeks probably as I was selecting the core team. The sales marketing executive vp and I went around and around and we were in a meeting one day and the president was there I said guys step out the room for a second I want to settle this for once and for all."

Change leaders sought individuals who could “come out of the matrix”. This reference to the popular movie “The Matrix” invokes an image of individuals who are willing to take the red pill². These individuals are willing to escape their current, staid mindset or perspective and engage in a critical perspective, uncovering the problems, and misconceptions. Change team members must have some appreciation for the scope, complexity, and scale of the problems or changes facing the organization. Individuals with a multiplicity of experiences in the organization and exposure to customers were thought to have some grasp on the state of the matrix.

How do team members explain their selection? Being selected to join the change team is usually attributed to expressing discontent with how things are done in the organization, being a complainer, or being restless. One individual asked to join the change team explained:

“I don’t want to say I was malcontent, but I was one of those people who was never happy with the status quo, things can always be better. I was very vocal with my boss who was tolerant of me.”

Critiques of the organization were formulated with respect to their experience in several divisions or roles in the organization. Change agents in the making do not seem to identify with one division in the organization or be oriented to an occupation or community of practice. They have tenuous alliances with the structures and roles in the organization. One team member had, earlier in his career, moved from pricing to sales.

“I started meeting directly with customers and going through the contracts with them...The \$500 throw pillow no longer made a lot of sense when I had to be the guy to tell the customer about it.”

² Neo, the hero of the Matrix, is offered an opportunity to see the world in its true form. He only needs to take the red pill. Morpheus, his eventual guide through the “real” world, explains: “You take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill and you stay in Wonderland and I show you how deep the rabbit-hole goes. Remember -- all I am offering is the truth, nothing more.”

Although educated in a field such as law, accounting, or engineering, the careers of change agents stray from these fields and include a patch work of jobs through the organization. They are able (perhaps successful) at moving horizontally and vertically within and across organizations. One individual, an accountant, explained:

"I could sit down for four or six hours and hash through the pension account...But at the end of the day my interest in the numbers was how doing you get to the numbers. What is really driving that business result and what do those numbers actually mean."

These hypotheses are not at odds with descriptions of those who work within a system for a particular type of change. In order to both exist, and perhaps thrive, within an environment that one simultaneously seeks to change individuals must develop some form of detachment from their current role and status. These individuals have what is described as "dual consciousness" (DiMaggio 1991), a "double vision" (hooks 1990), or a "double consciousness" (Du Bois 1903). It is the dual nature of their identities - their view from the margin and the center – that keeps them from being assimilated into the system and allows them to work for improvement and change (Meyerson and Scully 1995).

Accepting the role

In the midst of their daily life in the organization, potential team members are identified, called up from the ranks, and asked to work on a major change initiative. This may be the first time in their career they participate in such an endeavor. Those selected may not be interested in being involved and may join reluctantly.

I actually turned it down twice. I said I don't think I want to do this. My plans were clearly something else. I am a line person at heart and I am about business results. There are some people who are these quality geeks; you know that it is all about doing quality the right way...

She asked me to put my money where my mouth was (boss asks him to join the core design team). I complained a lot about the way things were, so at that point I had to decide whether I was going to fix it or not."

Accepting the role of team member was most often explained as an opportunity to be involved in a high profile project, a learning experience, and a potential career enhancing task. In addition, many members explained that if there was going to be change in the organization, they would rather do it than have it done to them.

Learning about the change initiative

The members of the change team are not usually versed in the idea of process management.

Before beginning work on the change team, members will undergo a time of education. In some organizations this involved a three day offsite, while in others it involved months of courses, reading, discussion, and planning. The leader of them generally decides how members will be exposed to the idea. Courses and seminar are attended, books purchased, and consultants or coaches brought in to help.

We spent about seven months doing what I would call more infrastructure type things. We developed a communications process, we developed a great deal of training, and did a lot of training, did a lot of communicating, redesigned methodology which is largely based on Hammer's work. Through that, we read a lot of books, went to a lot of Hammer courses, spent a lot of time seeking out others who were doing similar work.

During the education and preparation phase, the change team will develop some collective meaning of what they are undertaking. In other words, their pursuit will be framed. Three aspects of framing appear to take place: diagnostic framing; prognostic framing; motivational framing (Benford and Snow 2000). The "problem" has to be defined – there has to be something that needs changing – an adversarial idea or approach. The solution has to be identified, examined, and defended. Lastly, there has to be some motivation for pursuing the change. While these frames are ready made in the media, consultancies, etc. the actors appropriate and modify

these to suit their particular situation, their circumstances. From these external sources they can garner the cultural resources and legitimacy they will need to pursue the change.

Experiencing personal transformation- Eighteen Inches

Although process management is often referred to as “organizational transformation”, another transformation occurs that appears to be critical to bridging from being a participant to becoming a change agent. The change agent experiences a sense of personal transformation. The difference between conceptualizing the change in classes, readings and meetings and experiencing the change is described as significant: *“you know, there is a difference in knowing and believing, you conceptually know it and now you have to experience it”*. Another member explained that you can get the idea of process but there are a lot of ideas out there and they can replace the idea of process, but if the idea of process takes the eighteen inch journey the individual will be committed to the idea of process. Eighteen inches is the distance, on average, between one’s head and heart. Becoming an agent seems to involve a conversion process in which you begin to *“know it in your heart”*. While this sounds overblown, verging on cult-like, the interviewee continued: *“it’s not about being process zealot but it is about how about we can just see we are just on the cusp. You can see the value that can be, that potential energy that can be unleashed, if we can only make it to here.”*

This 18 inch journey happens in two ways. First, the individual, in her role on the change team, experiences some of the implications of process based management. She no longer has a well-defined job; they have no reports, more than a few bosses, and so on. First hand, they engage in the change they are trying to produce.

“I sat at the table in front of 60 people and say, ‘folks, here’s what process means. It means titles don’t matter so much and offices don’t matter so much and direct career paths don’t matter so much, and by the way, in this last five minutes I’m talking about

me. ' ... I can tell you what happened at ABC company and I can tell you what happened in all these other companies, but when I tell you it happened to me, that I believe in it and I'm willing to do it, that's the passion of this 18 inch journey from your head to your heart."

In line with these changes, members found they had to develop new skill sets. The literature describes champions as having superior influence and leadership tactics (Howell and Higgins 1990). In contrast, members of the change teams described having to learn how to facilitate and influence change in their organization. Most described some degree of success in the organization; however, the skills, tactics, knowledge, and relationships that contributed to their past success are not sufficient in their new role.

I'm not a touchy feely kind of guy. My idea is just go get it done and we'll clean it up later, and to an extent I think I'm wired that way, but the learning I had was, that's not the way you'll ever get anything to last... I had to resist every urge and everything that had made me successful prior to my work in process.

Most had to adjust from exercising their hierarchical authority to persuading, influencing, and drawing on other resources in pushing the change effort forward. Between this agreement to be a member and their transformative experience was a struggle. They had to rethink their position, their resources, their skills, and finally their activities. Being a change agent involves a different set of activities than being a manager or professional:

I still have a 3 x 5 card in my desk drawer that I colored with a pen – both sides completely red – during a day long meeting and at the end of the day my boss said, what in the heck was that? I said well I had to feel like I finished something. This (meeting all day to plan) was not work to me. I was used to dealing with customers and fighting fires and checking boxes and accomplishing things, and this talking and thinking endlessly in these meetings was driving me crazy.

The second way the 18 inch journey occurs is through articulating and visualizing the work of the organization. Most process redesign projects involve a wall. In a conference rooms a long, uninterrupted wall is cleared of pictures and plaques and covered with paper. Over a course of

weeks or months, the change team will diagram the workflows involved in a process. The work – the day-in, day-out activities of the people around you – become known, connected, and placed into context. The business is made visible, tangible, holistic, and literal.

“If you think about some traditional manufacturing you can see the work... We have 3000 people in one building that do one thing – move information. And one of the issues with this is that you can’t see it. The way we do it is really messy and broken...but it sits in computers and sits in peoples heads and until we got it on the walls and drew it out explicitly they could not see the problems and the disconnects. So we really get it out of their heads and out of the information systems and explicitly show at a work level the case for change.”

“until you have stared into the face of scope, scale, and complexity of the business... until you have sat back and really woken up to it, awakened, realized the magnitude of what that all means...until you carried all of that on your shoulders and really got a sense of all of that, I don’t think process really makes sense to you, because all you really see is your function. All you really see is this is the spreadsheet of the day, or this is the problem of the moment, or this is the issue of the week. You know, this is the functional problem I am trying to solve.”

What they begin to see as they map the work is that the problem is straight forward and that the solution can be developed. They identify themselves, the organization itself as the problem and paraphrase the famous line *“We have met the enemy and the enemy is us”*. The power of this wall in transforming a person is not to be underestimated. A champion realized, as they began to work on the wall that he and the others that worked on the project were going to be “ruined”.

“We told them we are going to ruin you for other work for the rest of your careers. You are not going to be able to work in a traditional hierarchical b.s. driven political company that doesn’t focus on process and so forth and we were pretty much right.”

“I have a span of control and yeah so I work on improving what I do and I’m a good boss and I do try and improve and do better for the customer. But I only think of things in the context of my span of control. I don’t think of two things. I don’t think of them from end to end and I don’t necessarily think of them from all of the stakeholder perspectives.”

Converting – the challenge and the burden

Change agents described the challenge of needing to lead the entire organization through a transformation similar to that which they experienced on their own. If they could get people to

see the work and understand the business, that is the customer, they felt that 80% of people would experience things similarly.

I would say the huge majority of peoples' resistance, their reluctance, is not fact based. If you get down to the root of their reluctance, it's not a logical issue, it's an emotional one. I'd beat you to death with the numbers ten years ago, over analyze things. Today I don't even attempt to convince people of a lot of things from a logical standpoint.

Change agents seem to cross some invisible threshold that leads them to a new worldview, a new understanding of how the organization could be otherwise. Implementing this worldview, trying to transform the organization, is experienced; however, as a burden. Transforming the organization, it turns out, is challenging. Some don't appreciate your vision for the new organization; others don't have the commitment, and so on. But the transformation that these change agents undergo does not allow them "to go back".

"if I'd have known how hard it would have been I would have never started, now that I've started I'd never go back.... It's so elegantly simple how could anybody not see this is the better way. And then when you get in the middle of it you discover (how hard it is)"

Many of the change agents become involved in formal and informal inter-organizational networks of champions. These relations provide support and supply information about process management and redesign. The role extends beyond the boundaries of the organization.

"I got a call yesterday from BigLife and a couple of weeks ago from BigTire... You get to those points where you don't feel like anybody in the organization understands what you're going through at times and you really just want to talk to somebody who understands what you're feeling, what you're seeing. Somebody who can tell you what not to do as much as tell you what to do. Those are very comforting conversations. I have called and said, "I've got a process issue and I know you've probably experienced this, could you help me?" And, I have never had anybody say, "No, I don't have time." It's one of those things where it's almost a feeling of it's you against the world some days and you've got a friend out there that knows your pain."

Diffusing business process management

Eleven of the fifteen team members that describe experiencing a conversion process, eight of those team members go on to initiate and lead a business process management change project in a another organization. That is, they become change agents that transfer managerial ideas across organizational boundaries. In some cases, the individual takes a similar job in another organization and from that position begins to mobilize for this particular form of organizational change. They mobilize either at a local level, in their department, or on an organizational level. In other cases, the individual moves directly into a business process role in a new organization. These change agents did not necessarily experience a successful implementation in their initial organization. Some left the organization where the change failed or was put on hold. Some experienced success. The remaining three “converts” continue to work on business process management in the organization where they originally became change team members.

Conclusion

While it is believed that “changes in large systems ultimately depend on comparable radical changes among individuals and groups” (Gersick 1991 p 35), relatively little is known about these changes in individuals. This study sheds light on an under studied phenomenon: the development of agents of change. A participant in a study of matrix management explained that “the challenge is not so much to build a matrix structure as it is to create a matrix in the minds of our managers” (Bartlett and Ghoshal 1990 p 145). Change projects require not only a smart design but also a process through which employees become deeply engaged and committed.

The study also opens up the notion of a “change career” in which individuals may develop their career around change experiences. Heckscher (1995) gives some insight into what happens to individuals that participate in organizational change. They develop a passion around their particular project (turnarounds in the case he selected) and also their interest in continuing education around leadership and team building issues that would help them develop skills needed to do this kind of work across organizations: “able to move from organization to organization while bringing a special ability to mobilize people around projects” (pg 147).

Further interviews and analysis is required to test and further elaborate the findings presented in this paper. Additional interviewees will be sampling to maximize variation of the change experience. Interviews will also be conducted to understand the selection process. Further different methods of organizational change will be examined to determine whether the type of organizational change studied is important to the process of becoming an agent of change.

References

- Allen, T. (1971). "Communications, technology transfer, and the role of the technical gatekeeper." R&D Management 1: 14-21.
- Ancona, D. G. and D. F. Caldwell (1990). "Beyond Boundary Spanning: Managing External Dependence in Product Development Teams." Journal of High Technology Management Research 1: 119-135.
- Barley, S. R. and P. S. Tolbert (1997). "Institutionalization and Structuration: Studying the Links between Action and Institution." Organization Studies 18(1): 93-117.
- Barnett, W. P. and G. R. Carroll (1995). "Modeling Internal Organizational Change." Annual Review of Anthropology 21.
- Bartlett, C. A. and S. Ghoshal (1990). "Matrix Management: Not a structure, a frame of mind." Harvard Business Review 68(4): 138-45.
- Benford, R. D. and D. A. Snow (2000). "Framing Processes and Social Movements: An overview and assessment." Annual Review of Sociology 26: 611-639.
- Brown, R. H. (1978). "Bureaucracy as Praxis: Towards a Political Phenomenology of Formal Organizations." Administrative Science Quarterly 23: 365-382.
- Cole, R. E. (1985). "The Macropolitics of Organizational Change: A Comparative Analysis of the Spread of Small-Group Activities." Administrative Science Quarterly 30(4): 560-585.
- Davenport, T. H., L. Prusak, et al. (2003). What's the big idea? : creating and capitalizing on the best management thinking. Boston, Harvard Business School Press.
- Day, D. L. (1994). "Raising Radicals: Different processes for championing innovative corporate ventures." Organization Science 5(2): 148-172.
- DiMaggio, P. (1991). Constructing an Organizational Field as a Professional Project: U.S. Art Museums, 1920-1940. The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis. P. DiMaggio and W. W. Powell. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

DiMaggio, P. (2001). Conclusion: The Futures of Business Organization and Paradoxes of Change. The Twenty-First-Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective. P. DiMaggio. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Dobbin, F. and J. R. Sutton (1998). "The Strength of a Weak State: The Rights Revolution and the Rise of Human Resources Management Division." American Journal of Sociology 104(2): 441-76.

Dobbin, F., J. R. Sutton, et al. (1993). "Equal-Opportunity Law and the Construction of Internal Labor-Markets." American Journal of Sociology 99(2): 396-427.

Drucker, P. F. (1993). Post-capitalist Society. New York, Harper Business.

Dubois, W. E. B. (1903). The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches. Chicago, A.C. McClurg & Co.

Edelman, L. B. (1990). "Legal Environments and Organizational Governance - the Expansion of Due-Process in the American Workplace." American Journal of Sociology 95(6): 1401-1440.

Fligstein, N. (1991). The Structural Transformation of American Industry: An Institutional Account of the Causes of Diversification in the Largest Firms, 1919-1979. The New Institutionalism in Organizational Studies. W. W. Powell and P. DiMaggio. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Frost, P. J. and C. P. Egri (1991). "The political process of innovation." Research in Organizational Behavior 13: 229-295.

Gersick, C. J. G. (1991). "Revolutionary Change Theories: A Multilevel Exploration of the Punctuated Equilibrium Paradigm." The Academy of Management Review 16(1): 10-36.

Guth, W. and A. Ginsberg (1990). "Corporate Entrepreneurship." Strategic Management Journal(11): 297-308.

Hammer, M. and J. Champy (1993). Reengineering the Corporation: A Manifesto for a Business Revolution. New York, Harper Business.

Hammer, M. (2001). The Agenda: What Every Business Must Do to Dominate the Decade. New York, Crown Business.

Heckscher, C. C. (1995). White-Collar Blues: Management Loyalties in an Age of Corporate Restructuring. New York, Basic Books.

hooks, b. (1990). Yearning: race, gender, and cultural politics. Boston, South End Press.

Howell, J. M. and C. A. Higgins (1990). "Champions of Technological Change." Administrative Science Quarterly 35(2): 317-341.

Kanter, R. M. (1983). The change masters : innovation for productivity in the American corporation. New York, Simon & Schuster.

Kanter, R. M. (1989). When giants learn to dance : mastering the challenge of strategy, management, and careers in the 1990s. New York, Simon & Schuster.

M.W., L. and P. L.L. (1992). "An agency perspective on new technology champions." Organization Science 3(3).

Markham, S. K. (2000). "Corporate Championing and Antagonism as Forms of Political Behavior: An R & D Perspective." Organization Science 11(4): 428-447.

Meyerson, D. and M. Scully (1995). "Tempored Radicals and the Politics of Ambivalence and Change." Organization Science 6(5): 585-600.

Osterman, P. (1999). Securing Prosperity: The american labor market, how it has changed and what we can do about it. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Petrozzo, D. P. and J. C. Stepper (1994). Successful Reengineering. New York, Van Nostrand Reinhold.

Powell, W. W. (2001). The Capitalist Firm in the Twenty-First Century: Emerging Patterns in Western Enterprise. The Twenty-First-Century Firm: Changing Economic Organization in International Perspective. P. DiMaggio. Princeton, Princeton University Press.

Powell, W. W. and P. DiMaggio, Eds. (1991). The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Roberts, E. B. (1988). "What we've learned: Managing invention and innovation." Research in Technological Management January: 11-29.

Rogers, E. M. (1983). The diffusion of innovations. New York, Free Press.

Rubinstein, S. A. and T. Kochan (2001). Learning from Saturn: Possibilities for corporate governance and employee relations. Ithaca, ILR Press.

Schon, D. A. (1963). "Champions for radical new inventions." Harvard Business Review 41(March-April): 77-86.

Thomas, R. J. (1994). What Machines Can't Do: Politics and Technology in the Industrial Enterprise. Berkeley, University of California Press.

Weick, K. E. (1984). "Small Wins: Redefining the Scale of Social Problems." American Psychologist: 40-49.

Zuboff, S. (1988). In the Age of the Smart Machine: the Future of Work and Power. New York, Basic Books Inc.