From Organizational Development to Change Management

The Emergence of a New Profession

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This article describes the emergence of change management as a service offering of major consulting firms. The authors compare change management with traditional organizational development (OD) in terms of theory and analytical framework, the role of the interventionist, and intervention strategies. They argue that change management has the potential to become a discipline that can unite the different "thought worlds" operating in the field of planned organizational change.

During the last decade, an increasing dissatisfaction with traditional organizational development (OD) has surfaced (Jelinek & Litterer, 1988). In his distinguished speaker address to the Academy of Management 6 years ago, Robert E. Quinn (1993)

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concluded that OD has become irrelevant. The demand for better ways of managing change is enormously high, but Quinn argued that the field is invisible to the majority of executives, that OD practitioners do not understand business, that there is little growth in OD departments, and that OD has failed to generate any interest among MBA students. He described a vision for a new profession based on the idea of "the legitimate change agent"—a person who should understand both the world of business and the world of human relationships.

We would argue, however, that there is no need for creating a new profession: The legitimate change agent is already here. Whereas Quinn (1993) talked about a vision for a new profession, today it is meaningful to speak about the emergence of a new profession. OD principles and techniques are experiencing a renaissance, thanks to the growth of the field of change management, which is dedicated to tackling the kind of large-scale change that Quinn described. We observe that the major consulting firms—including those that in the past dealt exclusively with strategy or operations—now have separate divisions or competency groups specializing in change management; many of these have published books on the topic. Examples include "Real Change Agents" from McKinsey & Co. (Katzenbach & Becker, 1996), "Accelerating Change" from Arthur D. Little (Maira & Scott-Morgan, 1997), and "Transforming the Enterprise" from Gemini Consulting (Gouillart & Kelly, 1995). In terms of scale, Firm A is the leading firm, with approximately 5,000 professionals in its change management competency group and 53,000 consultants in total (see Table 1).[1] The consulting firms that we spoke with indicated that they expected further growth in the number of change management consultants.

We also note a growing number of universities with research units dedicated to the study of organizational change. Examples include the Australian Graduate School of Management and Warwick and Sheffield universities in the United Kingdom. Moreover, we observe that the importance of the human side of business change plays a central part in the rhetoric employed by high-profile top managers. For example, the CEO of a major U.S. corporation stated, "the 90s is the decade when soft becomes hard. Being able to manage the unpredictable human side becomes a significant differentiator between winners and losers." In other words, quite in contrast to Quinn's (1993) observations regarding OD, we find an area of tremendous growth with high visibility to top managers. But to what extent does change management differ from OD? Does the emergence of change management signal a shift to a new paradigm for effecting organizational change?

It should be emphasized at the outset that comparisons of this type are not straightforward. The field of OD has evolved over time since its beginnings in the 1930s. Even today, many different conceptions of OD exist in the literature. In the business world, many change efforts have been casually labeled "OD" even though they might have borne little resemblance to the type of programs prescribed in the literature. Nevertheless, we believe that there is sufficient commonality to make comparison possible. A

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TABLE 1

Examples of Change Management Practices Within Some Major Consulting Firms

	Firm A	*Firm B*	*Firm C*	*Firm D*	*Firm E*
Year the practice was established	Started with training related to IT implementation in the 1980s	Started change management work in 1988; formal practice established in 1992	Formal practice launched in 1990	Original group established in 1993	Formalized in 1996
Number of consultants	5,000 (estimate)	674	500	220	100
Subunits	Change navigation Human capital Organization design and development Performance design and development	Organizational change group Transition management group	Business change implementation Human resource transformation Post merger integration Learning solutions	Individual and organizational change Strategic leadership Strategic HRM	Leadership development Organization design Systemic understanding HR systems Team effectiveness Knowledge processes Change management
Key methodology	Change management framework Includes tools for organization design, culture change, etc.	"The method" The organizational change framework Organizational change and culture change tools are part of this methodology	"Solutions accelerators" Include tools for organizational design, change management, communications, etc.	The discipline has an overall change philosophy with many change models and strategies	Two principal methods: "Accelerating performance" "Fluid network organization" Plus combinations of change management methods with tools of other practices, such as "mergers and alliances."

NOTE: IT = information technology; HRM = human resource management; HR = human resources.

review of the literature suggests four key dimensions to OD. First, most authors define OD as planned interventions aimed at increasing organizational effectiveness (Beckhard, 1969; French & Bell, 1990). Second, OD relies heavily on concepts and research findings from the behavioral sciences, primarily from psychology (French & Bell, 1990). Third, OD is a long-term and continuous effort (French & Bell, 1990). Fourth, OD is largely focused on human relations variables (such as culture and climate, communication, leadership styles, and job satisfaction). Typical intervention strategies have been focused on the microlevel and include process consultation, team building, survey feedback, and work restructuring (French & Bell, 1990). Variations exist both in terms of theory and practice of OD (Dalin & Rust, 1983). For example, some OD consultants have focused on only one of these intervention strategies, whereas others have used different strategies in different phases of a change effort. Early work treated OD in a "humanistic" manner as a social technology that should be governed by employees (e.g., Walton & Warwick, 1973); other authors (e.g., Beckhard, 1969) emphasized that OD should be managed from the top. In some cases, the human process focus has been complemented with interventions aimed at changing structure and work processes, such as sociotechnical design principles (e.g., Pava, 1986).

The remainder of this article is divided into two sections. In the first section, we contrast OD as defined above with change management as defined by major consulting firms. We will explore the possibility that change management is a new and distinct field rather than an extension of OD. In particular, we will focus on three key areas of difference: (a) the underlying theory and the analytical frameworks being used, (b) the role of the change agent or the interventionist, and (c) the intervention strategies that are employed. In the second section, we describe two major challenges associated with implementing large-scale change: integration (i.e., creating congruence between strategic, OD, and technological/business process perspectives) and navigation (the temporal management of the "change journey" as it unfolds over time). Finally, we mention the development of models and tools that are intended to assist companies in integration and navigation.

The analysis draws on our previous experience with a large consulting firm, which was one of the first to establish a separate change management practice. We have participated as consultants in a number of large-scale change programs; we also have observed how the firm is developing analytical tools and working approaches to assist corporations in implementing strategic change. Although we have worked with only one consulting firm, we have interacted with consultants from practically all major consulting firms in our current role as academics and executive teachers. We also conducted a telephone survey and reviewed published material about the change management activities of other leading consulting firms (see Table 1).

THEORY AND ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In terms of its scope, the term change management is currently used in a manner that encompasses theory and intervention strategies associated with what is known in the academic literature as OD, human resource management (HRM), project

management, and strategic change. One of the firms in our survey defined its change management activities in the following way:[2]

> Change Management is the discipline that ensures organizations and employees meet new and existing performance targets rapidly and effectively. We do this by helping clients create the right management disciplines and processes, organization structures, culture, competencies and capability for superior human performance so that change goals are achieved and sustained.
>
> At its essence, Change Management is based on two concepts:
>
> That human performance is at the core of business performance; therefore we help clients build the human performance in their organizations.
>
> That it's possible to optimize an organization's revenue and profit delivery during change; therefore we help clients determine ways to manage the change process effectively to ensure this occurs.

In this definition, change management is clearly broader than OD in that it includes a wide range of intervention strategies that may enhance human performance directly or indirectly, including process consultation, work restructuring, strategic HRM planning, and the design or development of information technology (IT) solutions (e.g., user interface design). A crucial feature of change management is that it is seen as only one component of a larger organizational change effort, the other components being strategy, business processes, and technology. The main objective is often to integrate these components, for example, by creating a higher degree of congruence between strategic objectives and human resource policy (cf. Nadler, 1988) or by building a new IT infrastructure to support cross-functional teams (cf. Davenport, 1993). An important part of the knowledge base of change management is the academic research on strategic change. Pettigrew and Whipp (1993) and Kanter, Stein, and Jick (1992) have provided theoretical frameworks with their studies of major change over time.[3] In line with practitioner models of holistic change, these studies emphasize that moving from an old state to one adapted to the future environment often requires comprehensive change that involves many components, including human behavior, culture, organizational structure, work processes, and IT/infrastructure.

The focus on individual change as a part of wider strategic and corporate-level change is something that until recently received scant attention in OD theory. The same can be said about the enabling role of IT. Well-known OD theories such as those of Argyris, Schein, and Senge still focus on individual skills and attitudes with little regard for the role of structure and systems (cf. Edmondson, 1996). Katz and Kahn (1966) stated more than 30 years ago, "the major error in dealing with problems of organizational change, both at the practical and theoretical level, is to disregard the systemic properties of the organization and to confuse individual change with modification in organizational variables" (p. 390). This is not to say that the aforementioned theorists are totally unaware of these problems. Argyris (1970, p. 337) pointed out that the success of process consultation was dependent on follow-up changes in organizational structure and even technology. However, it is only recently that relevant analytical frameworks have emerged and that a profession has evolved that is dedicated to implementing change by interventions aimed simultaneously at multiple components of the organization.

THE ROLE OF THE INTERVENTIONIST

The classic view of the OD practitioner is the human process consultant or "facilitator." The facilitator is a neutral third party who, according to classic OD, should not get involved in the substantive content or provide specific recommendations (French & Bell, 1990). Picture an Argyris intervening to alter managers' "defensive routines," a Senge trying to draw "mental models," or a Schein collecting "clinical insights" about "tacit assumptions in the culture" (Edmondson, 1996). The theories of Senge, Argyris, and Schein have informed change management and continue to be used by its professionals, yet the facilitator model does not correspond very well to the role of a change management professional.

The most important difference is that change management consultants work in *teams*. These teams consist of people with complementary skills in such areas as strategy formulation, IT or business process analysis, and organization design and development.

Unfortunately, whereas the role of the facilitator is well understood and extensively documented thanks to the research of people like Lewin, Argyris, Senge, and Schein, there is surprisingly little research on how teams of change management consultants interact with managers over time during large-scale organizational change projects. One typical view in OD textbooks (e.g., French & Bell, 1990) is that consultants act as "outside experts" and therefore often fail to gain sufficient commitment for their recommendations. Although this might still be a potential risk with some strategy consultants, this view of the consultant role is essentially an outdated one. Practically all major consulting firms now seek long-term partnerships with their clients, and most of the time, the teams consist of a combination of client managers and consultants. Client commitment and ownership are built through a joint process of diagnosis, planning, and implementation. It is often impossible to single out specific reports as being the "consultant reports," because more often than not they express the consensus of all members in a team consisting of both consultants and client managers. In this manner, change management essentially blends human process consultation with technical interventions aimed at changing systems and structure.

INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Historically, perhaps the main contribution of OD is that it has helped focus attention on the social and psychological aspects of change. However, there are many ways of dealing with the psychological aspects of business change. In his earlier writings, Argyris (1973) argued that changes in managerial attitudes and behavior must usually precede changes in organization design. In classic OD, the basic assumption (which fits the facilitator role described above) is that you must change your attitudes or ideas (i.e., your mental model, metaphor, theory-in-use, or tacit assumption) before you can change the structure or technology of your organization. In contrast, most of the change management professionals we know lean more toward the view held by

Michael Beer and his associates (Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Beer & Walton, 1990), who emphasize that changes in both structure/systems and human process are necessary to effect attitude and behavior change. The sequencing of interventions should induce new behaviors rather than trying to educate people about them. The preferred intervention according to this model is one in which culture change is an intended by-product of business-oriented change. Employees learn new behaviors and attitudes by participating in ad-hoc teams aimed at solving real business problems. In other words, "Changes in context affect changes in employee behavior first, before attitudes, norms or skills are well formed" (Beer & Walton, 1990, p. 160). Changes in formal structure and systems can then take place after commitment and competence have been developed by widespread involvement in the change process.

The type of interpersonally oriented interventions prescribed in classic OD is obviously only a subset of a larger number of possible interventions. To be effective, interventions must be tailored to the type of problem one is trying to solve. In some cases, technical or structural solutions may be quite appropriate (cf. Herold, 1978). In discussing methods for enhancing team effectiveness, Hackman (1986) concluded that improving the design of work might be a better approach than trying to modify individual motivation or group norms directly.

Many of the tools used by change management professionals are identical to those used in traditional OD; the difference is that they are used with a different rationale, in a different context, and often by different people. One example is attitude surveys, which were used to inform management about employee morale already in the 1930s. Since then, thousands of companies have used employee attitude surveys to gauge job satisfaction and employees' perceptions of the corporate culture or climate. Today, however, employee attitude surveys are often used to diagnose the capacity for adapting to change and the degree to which new strategic initiatives are being implemented (Schneider, Ashworth, Higgs, & Carr, 1996). Rather than being a stand-alone effort at assessing job satisfaction and climate, this tool is now routinely employed as part of strategy-driven and holistic change programs. The same is the case for individual-level and interpersonally oriented interventions, such as those developed by Chris Argyris aimed at producing "double-loop" learning. During the 1960s, these interventions were frequently conducted as isolated attempts at increasing trust and communication (Evans, 1989; Jelinek & Litterer, 1988). About a decade ago, however, Argyris realized that this was merely "a human resource goody." Since then, he has become more interdisciplinary oriented in trying to integrate such interpersonal interventions with technical disciplines (Argyris, 1996). Table 2 summarizes the features that distinguish current thinking in change management from classic OD.

There now is ample empirical evidence for the value of holistic approaches to change. For example, Deborah Dougherty has carried out several case studies in manufacturing firms and found that implementation of new technologies is more successful when accompanied by changes in structure, policies, and culture at the same time. She concluded, "Piecemeal tweaks and incremental shifts (. . .) are not enough. Managers need to grab the configuration and shift it all at once" (Dougherty & Cohen, 1995, p. 100). The idea of holistic change is a close analogy to a concept in strategic

TABLE 2
Distinctive Features Associated With Organizational Development and Change Management

	Organizational Development	*Change Management*
Underlying theory and analytical framework	Based primarily on psychology (human process)	Includes principles and tools from sociology, information technology, and strategic change theories
	Individual/ group functioning	Individual/group functioning AND systems, structures, work processes (congruence model)
Role of change agent	Facilitator or process consultant	Content expert (organization design and human performance) AND process consultant
		Member of cross-functional team, which includes strategists and technologists
		Part of project organization, which includes client managers/employees
Intervention strategies	Not directly linked to strategy	Driven by strategy
	Focus on one component at a time	Simultaneous focus on several components (strategy, human resources, organization design, technology)
	Normative-reeducative (change attitudes to change behavior)	Action oriented (change behavior before attitudes)

management, namely, complementarity. Within the resource-based view of strategy (e.g., Barney, 1991; Teece & Pisano, 1994), complementarity is said to exist when a resource produces greater returns in the presence of another resource than it does alone. Powell and Dent-Micallef (1997) conducted a quantitative test of this proposition and found that IT has not produced competitive advantage alone but that some firms have gained advantages by using IT to leverage intangible, complementary resources such as flexible cultures, planning processes, and supplier relationships. Huselid, Jackson, and Schuler (1997) are engaged in a line of research that investigates the links between strategic HRM (or "high performance work systems") and corporate financial performance. They define HRM as an "internally consistent set of policies and practices that ensure that a firm's human capital contributes to the achievement of business objectives" (p. 171). The results show strong support for the assertion that strategic HRM enhances firm performance.

THE CHALLENGES OF INTEGRATION AND NAVIGATION

Traditional OD overlooked the enabling role of infrastructure and the possibility of technology-led change (Jelinek & Litterer, 1988). In contrast, among managers the

TABLE 3
Thought Worlds Related to Organizational Change and Development

Themes That Differentiate Thought Worlds	*The Strategists*	*The Organizational Developers*	*The Technologists*
Primary source of ineffectiveness in organizations	Strategic logic or organizational structure	Cultural assumptions; mental models; defensive routines	Business processes and supporting infrastructure
Focus of attention	Competitive environment, customer needs, organizational structure	People and human resource support systems	Product characteristics, work processes, manufacturing technologies
Typical intervention	A strategy report; a plan for restructuring	A management team session led by an organizational development "facilitator"	A new information technology system

tendency is often the opposite: to focus exclusively on technical and structural solutions. Despite the fact that alignment between culture and technology is associated with more successful outcomes (e.g., Dougherty & Cohen, 1995; Powell & Dent-Micallef, 1997; Zammuto & O'Connor, 1992), it is also the case that managers tend to perceive technical innovations as more effective than administrative innovations (Damanpour, 1990). This is perhaps why administrative change tends to lag related technical change (Symon & Clegg, 1991). Integration and alignment between strategic, social, and technical components require collaboration between people possessing skills in different areas. However, such collaboration is often difficult. This is why we consider integration one of two key challenges during large-scale organizational change. Dougherty (1992) has described how functional and departmental "thought worlds" impede the collective action necessary for successful product innovation. Thought worlds selectively filter information and insights. Thought worlds cannot easily share ideas and may view each other's central issues as meaningless.

We will make a similar claim when it comes to organizational change: People with different educational backgrounds and functional responsibilities tend to develop distinctive perspectives on how one should go about planning and executing organizational change programs. Table 3 shows, in a somewhat stylized manner, some of the themes that differentiate thought worlds related to organizational change. There are also a number of more subtle distinctions. For example, technical experts (e.g., manufacturing engineers) tend to deal with tasks that can (and must) be standardized and controlled so that they can be repeated in a reliable fashion. In contrast, the typical OD practitioner tends to see routines and procedures as things that stifle creativity and foster dissatisfaction (cf. Adler & Borys, 1996). The existence of different thought worlds frequently leads to conflicts both over the goals for the change program and the means selected to achieve the goals (e.g., "empowerment" vs. "programming"). The

differences become even more entrenched and rigid if the change process is associated with high stress due to external threat or high risk of failure. Stress tends to increase reliance on the well-learned elements of cognitive and behavioral repertoires (Sutton, 1990).

In line with the view of holistic change described above, both structural and cultural solutions must be developed to achieve integration. As we have indicated above, consulting firms routinely employ cross-functional teams in which all perspectives are represented. The emergence of interdisciplinary teams can be understood by means of existing theory on organization design and requisite variety. The principle of requisite variety states that "the internal regulatory mechanisms of a system must be as diverse as the environment with which it is trying to deal" (Morgan, 1986, p. 47). The primary external requirement for the change team is the task: A project may encompass interventions in strategic processes, human resources, and business processes, and the collective competence of the team should therefore match these task requirements. A second requirement relates to effective communication and collaboration with people outside the team (cf. Ancona & Caldwell, 1992): The client personnel who are involved may themselves have many different functional and professional backgrounds, and an interdisciplinary team is more likely to be able to communicate with these diverse constituents.

At the same time, integration requires mechanisms that compensate for the cognitive and demographic diversity in the team. Integration is facilitated by strong socialization practices that emphasize the linkage between the different skills sets and knowledge bases (e.g., joint training seminars involving both strategists, technologists, and behavioral scientists). Consulting firms also employ detailed and structured methodologies that facilitate "cognitive coordination," both between different consultants and between consultants and the client system. Standardized methodologies provide a shared interface that enables the exchange of experience and ideas across disciplinary and functional boundaries (Werr, Stjernberg, & Docherty, 1996; Worren, Moore, & Elliott, 1998).

A second major challenge is the ongoing management over time of the change program (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1993), which we call navigation. This usually involves various high-level project-management tasks, such as the coordination of a number of interrelated projects and the measurement of progress against milestones (Neill & Hemstritch, 1995). As mentioned above, a major issue in terms of navigation is the sequencing of interventions over time (e.g., when to introduce changes in formal structure). As the change program unfolds, the context may also change, creating the need for continuous adaptations. It is often difficult to strike the right balance between top-down direction on one hand and participation, empowerment, and flexibility on the other. The most successful change programs are able to use bureaucratic means such as standardization and formal working arrangements in a creative and enabling way, which facilitate rather than hinder innovation (Adler & Borys, 1996; Craig, 1995). Ruddle and Feeny (1997) describe different approaches to navigation in a study of British companies. Programmatic leadership (i.e., detailed planning and top-down management) of the change program might be appropriate where the destination and change journey are predictable and the time-scale for action short. A more

transformational leadership style is necessary when radical shifts are required in a context of high uncertainty.

Both integration and navigation are facilitated by shared cognitive maps about change. One example of such a map is the "journey metaphor" used by many consulting firms. By comparing change to a journey, one can draw analogies to journeys such as foreign travel or mountaineering, which require an itinerary or road map (a change program), a destination (the desired outcome), monitoring of the steps along the way, and possibly midcourse corrections (navigation). Journeys might also be divided into distinct phases (the analogy could be different camps during a mountain ascent). In the same way as for more detailed methodologies, such high-level cognitive maps should facilitate understanding and coordination between different thought worlds (Werr et al., 1996).

Transformational change can be revolutionary in outcome yet evolutionary in execution.[4] The goal for many consulting firms is to build a cumulative knowledge base so that new change programs can build on previous experience. In looking toward future developments in the field, we believe that both researchers and consulting firms will continue efforts at codifying the often tacit knowledge about change processes. One promising trend is the development of a more systematic understanding of different types of change journeys. The research reported in Miller and Friesen (1980) shows that changes come in packages: The same types of transitions tend to recur frequently even across firms with highly different characteristics. Efforts are under way at developing typologies of change journeys, based on a categorization of context, content, and process. Ongoing research looks at how different companies achieve transformational change and aims at building a typology that describes journeys over time (Huy, 1998; Ruddle & Feeny, 1997). With a typology in hand, it will be possible to develop a more contingency-oriented, prescriptive framework for change management. By collecting information on a set of performance measures at different stages of the journeys, it will be possible to develop benchmarks that will allow comparisons across companies. Databases with such information should allow more systematic hypothesis testing of the effectiveness of alternative change management strategies.

DISCUSSION

Our comparison between traditional OD and change management defined by major consulting firms suggests that change management represents a new approach: There are differences with regard to underlying theory and analytical framework, the role of the change agent, and the preferred intervention strategies.

Although the current literature lends support to key ideas behind change management, there are, of course, differences with regard to the skills of both individual consultants and the capabilities of the different consulting firms. For example, after presenting an earlier version of this article at the 1996 Academy of Management conference, we received several letters from practitioners trained in the classic OD tradition who remarked that many change management consultants often lack understanding of basic OD theory. A closer look at actual change programs probably

would reveal a mixed picture of failures and successes, depending both on contextual factors and the skills of the individual consultants involved. However, this variability of skills does not detract from our argument. We believe that the emergence of change management is a significant trend, and we have shown that the basic principles of this approach are well supported in current research on large-scale change and strategic human resource management.

CONCLUSION

The need for integrative and holistic approaches to managing change is now acknowledged by people in many different fields. After having launched the reengineering movement, Michael Hammer now admits that he forgot about people. "I wasn't smart enough about that," he says. "I was reflecting my engineering background and was insufficiently appreciative of the human dimension. I've learned that's critical" (White, 1996, p. 1). OD practitioners, who have thought about people all along, now concede they forgot about markets, strategies, and computers. In the field of planned organizational change, one of the few things we know with some certainty is that change programs are rarely successful if they are directed at only one component in isolation from others. A well-known university president once stated that you cannot lift a blanket by one corner; there must be efforts at several points in order to raise the standard.[5] Change management promises to be a discipline that will integrate the thought worlds that separate OD from strategy and technology, thus enabling the coordinated efforts necessary to bring about strategic change.

NOTES

1. The editorial policy of this journal is to use fictitious names for firms to protect scientific integrity.

2. Different consulting firms describe change management in equivalent terms. See, for example, the description of the "Coopers & Lybrand Approach to Change Management" in Carr, Hardf, and Trahant (1996, p. 143) or Gemini Consulting's "Framework for Transformation" in Gouillart and Kelly (1995, p. 1).

3. It is common for consulting firms to form alliances with leading academics in the field. For example, Andrew Pettigrew is one of several academics who have assisted consulting firms in developing a methodology for large-scale change.

4. This point has been made by Gary Hamel of London Business School.

5. The statement is borrowed from Lawrence Lowell, cited in Morrison (1964, p. 444).

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