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Leveraging the Value of an Organizational Change  
Management Methodology

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# Leveraging the Value of an Organizational Change Management Methodology

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*Abstract: In today's environment successfully navigating change and developing organizational change capacity is essential for every organization. The pace of change today requires organizations to continuously adapt and respond. Greg Hackett, an American consultant and researcher, has called for a new organizational paradigm, where survivability, flexibility and systems thinking are key success factors (Hackett, 2006). This will require organizations to have an even greater investment in change. Yet, despite organizations' considerable investment in change to date, research shows about 70% of organizational change initiatives fail and many fail to give the expected return on investment (Miller 2002, Haines et al 2005, Alvesson & Svenningsson 2008). The challenge of "how to do" change management has become like the elixir of life; as organizations in an effort to capitalize on change management's potential attempt to adopt, develop and implement an organizational wide change management methodology. However, with the plethora of change management methodologies and models it can be difficult for an organization to know how to choose and use a change management methodology or model. The purpose of this paper is to 1) review the literature to identify the difference between change management methodologies and models, 2) explore the role and value organizational change management methodologies have in reducing failure rates for organizational change; 3) present a conceptual framework to guide organizations on the development, adoption and implementation of a change management methodology; 4) explore how organizations can leverage change management methodologies and models to achieve greater organizational change capacity.*

Keywords: Change Management Methodology, Change Management Model, Conceptual Framework, Organizational Change, Systems Thinking

## Introduction

**T**HERE WOULD BE little argument about the complexity and rate of change experienced by most organizations today (By Todenem, 2005; Haines, 2000). For many organizations change has become their unwanted but necessary business partner. Survival of most organizations depends on their ability to implement the right changes to support the organization (Armenakis & Harris, 2009).

However for most organizations implementing change is a risky endeavour (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Stebbings & Braganza, 2009). There is general consensus that most organizations have not been successful when implementing change and even those who have claimed victory often fail to achieve their intended value (Miller 2002, (Haines, Aller-Stead, & Mckinlay, 2005), Alvesson & Svenningsson 2008). This has become the paradox of organizational change, organizations must continually change in order to survive, but the very

nature of organizational change itself poses inherent risks for the organization (Klarner, Probst, & Soparnot, 2008).

Two reasons cited for the high failure rate are the lack of attention given to the human dynamics of change and a lack of knowledge of the underlying processes of change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Burnes, 1996, 2004). Conversely success has been attributed to an organization's adaptive capacity also termed its organizational change capacity (Gravenhorst, Werkman, & Boonstra, 2003; Klarner et al., 2008; Meyer & Stensaker, 2006).

Although there is general agreement that without careful attention to the people or human dynamics change cannot be successful (Armenakis & Harris, 2009) Karp & Helgo (2008) also argue the propensity to compartmentalize or segment the various aspects of change has led to approaches that are focused on the tools and techniques and not enough thought has been given to the overall leadership or management of the change. As they state "It is the management part of change management that is the challenge" (Karp & Helgo, 2008 p. 86). In the organizational leader's efforts to just "get it done" there has been a tendency to dismiss all the theoretical aspects of organizational change and the underlying assumptions, knowledge and understanding of the change process in favour of using a set of quick prescriptive steps (Burnes, 1996; Sanwal, 2008). Greg Hackett, an American consultant and researcher has stated what is needed is a new organizational paradigm, where survivability, flexibility and systems thinking are key success factors (Hackett, 2006).

The purpose of this paper is to explore the role and value of change management methodologies and models and to propose a conceptual framework that organizational leaders could use to leverage existing methodologies. Our goal in writing this paper was not to provide the definitive answer about change management methodologies or models but to stimulate thinking on how organizational leaders could begin to leverage the current knowledge of organizational change and associated methodologies to positively alter the success rates of organizational change.

## **Change Management Models and Change Management Methodology – Understanding the Difference**

Change management methodology, change management model; two terms that are often used interchangeably. However, for organizations attempting to use a change management model or methodology it is helpful to differentiate between the two terms because although related they are two different entities.

Change management models are typically a way of representing and describing through a series of steps, or stages a theoretical understanding of the change process (Rothwell & Sullivan, 2005; Kezar 2001; Mento et.al, 2002). A methodology differs from a model because it typically does not attempt to explain the phenomena but represents a set of structured activities or procedures that define the completion of an event or task. Another way to define methodology is as a collection of problem-solving methods governed by a set of principles and a common philosophy for solving targeted problems (Checkland 1981 in Kettinger, Teng, & Guha, 1997). Kettinger (1997) noted the further differentiation among methodology, techniques and tools. The methodology is represented as the highest level of abstraction followed by techniques which are defined as a set of specific steps or procedures and finally at the lowest level are the tools, which refer to specific items that enable a task to be performed such as software, or an assessment (Hackathorn & Karimi, 1988 in Kettinger, 1997).

Two underlying beliefs and their associated assumptions about how change occurs have shaped much of the development of organizational change models (By Todnem, 2005; Kezar, 2001). First is the belief that organizational change can be planned and managed through an understanding of its sequential steps (Burnes, 2004). The Planned change belief views change as externally driven and episodic and attempts to explain the stages or steps an organization must go through in order to effect the necessary or desired outcome (Burnes, 1996; By Todnem, 2005; Porras & Silvers, 1991). The second belief which has largely evolved due to the criticisms of planned change has been the belief that change is an organic process which cannot be managed (Burnes, 1996, 2004). Emergent change, as this belief has come to be known, reflects an understanding of change as a continuous learning process that stresses the analytical, evolutionary nature of change rather than a pre-defined series of step changes (Burnes, 1996; Shanley, 2007). More recently there has been a blending of these two beliefs to identify a third alternative called contingency theory. Contingency theory presupposes there is no one best way to approach organizational change and what is needed is a variety of approaches dependent on the situation and the organization (Burnes, 1996; Dunphy & Stace, 1993).

### **Value of Methodology**

Organizational change models and methodologies each provide an organization with valuable information to enable change. An organizational change model can help an organization understand why change occurs, how it will occur and what will occur (Kezar, 2001). A methodology provides organizational leaders with a structure for planning and organizing the specific steps and activities needed to implement organizational change. Many of the change management methodologies currently used in organizations today (Burnes, 1996; Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1951; Mento, Jones, & Dirndorfer, 2002) originated as an organizational change model.

The challenge of “how to do” change management has become like the elixir of life; as organizations in an effort to capitalize on change management’s potential attempt to adopt, develop and implement change management methodologies and practices. The adoption and implementation of a change management methodology may be seen as a solution to the increasing failure rate of organizational change and as a way for leaders to gain control of the magnitude and breadth of change in their organization. As such, there has been a proliferation of models and methodologies aimed at helping individuals and organizations better manage and adapt to change. A search of Amazon.com identified 1,310 results for books on change management methodology and 4,381 results for books on change management models.

Kettinger (1997) noted the plethora of business process change methodologies that have been developed in response to the business process re-engineering phenomenon with each methodology espousing itself as the solution to successful change. At the same time organizations are incorporating the management of change into existing roles and responsibilities of managers and leaders at all levels of the organization (Doyle, 2002). Where previously the responsibility of managing change might have been the unique role of an external resource or leader within the organization it is now more likely that anyone at any level would be expected to lead and facilitate change in the organization (Doyle, 2002).

Kezar (2001) noted in his review of the organizational change models more similarities among the models in different categories than differences. Similarly, although the number

of steps, and the specifics within each of the plethora of methodologies available may vary, there appears to be consensus on six elements necessary for organizational change (Burnes, 2004; Carnall, 2007; Kotter, 1996; Mento et al., 2002). A review of these six elements with six popular change management models and methodologies including the authors' proprietary methodology is presented in Table 1. General experience of the authors with other methodologies, including other proprietary methodologies also contained some representation of the six necessary elements. These six elements are not sufficient for organizational change but there is general consensus of the necessity of these elements for success. Therefore the question remained if these six essential elements are present in most change management methodologies what is contributing to the high failure rate among organizations?

**Table 1: Six Elements for Successful Organizational Change**

	Three Step Model (Kurt Lewin)	Total Quality Management (Deming )	Eight Stages of Change (John Kotter)	A Twelve Step Change Framework (Mento et., al)	DEAM	IMPLEMENT
Need for change	√	?	√	√	√	√
Define the outcome	√	√	√	√	√	√
Effective Leadership	√	√	√	√	√	√
Create a plan			√	√	√	√
Enable commitment	√	√	√	√	√	√
Create the environment	√	√	√	√	√	√

**Towards a Holistic Approach to Application of Change Management Methodology**

Where the methodologies fall short is that in the effort to translate a change model to a series of steps and tasks the underlying knowledge of how individuals respond to change is often lost. Therefore one reason, (and we are not suggesting the only reason), for the continued failure of organizational change despite the use of change management methodologies may be that leaders in their efforts to manage the change focus on managing the steps instead of managing the process of change. The problem, change does not occur in steps (Burke, 2002).

This type of reductionism approach to implementing organizational change fails to account for the human dynamics of change and purposefulness of people (Jackson, 2003). The lack of contextual knowledge coupled with the propensity to delegate the responsibility for making change to individuals who can avail of tools and templates but not understand the human response to change results in change leaders who are unable to modify or overcome the barrier because they lack sufficient contextual understanding (Andrews, Cameron, &

Harris, 2008). The result is ill-considered plans and activities which are based on simply copy and paste template completion and minimal understanding of the process of change.

One common model turned methodology, the Seven Step Change Acceleration process, which was used at GE refers to the seven steps as similar to a pilot's checklist (Gavin, 2000 in Mento et al., 2002). As a result of this type of checklist mentality, organizations lack the knowledge of how individuals and organizations deal with change. One study exploring the development of expert change facilitators noted training and development of internal change agents focused on developing technical change skills and neglected the softer behavioural skills of facilitating change even when the change initiative was aimed at effecting cultural transformation (Doyle, 2002). Findings of the study confirmed that technical skills were not enough and that to move individuals from novice to expert change facilitators require specific emphasis on the psychological and emotional elements of change leadership (Doyle, 2002).

Leveraging a change management methodology requires an ability to capture and disseminate with the use of the methodology an understanding of the underlying principles of organizational change and the human dynamics of change. It requires a shift to a holistic systems approach.

Organizations are not static objects but living dynamic social systems with unique ebbs and flows, where the individuals interact and build relationships such that when something happens in one part of the organization another part is affected (Review, 2003). One of the greatest disservices to the current use of change management methodologies is the failure to recognize that all change occurs within the context of the system and is not in itself one isolated event. As such, it must be approached with an understanding that the whole has its own characteristics separate and distinct from that of its parts (Checkland, 2000). When the application of change management methodology is approached as a series of discreet steps based on the typical project deliverable scenario the result is the whole becomes disconnected from its parts. When this happens the whole ends up looking very little like it was intended (Jackson, 2003).

Jackson (2003) identified four advantages of systems thinking that are relevant to our discussion on leveraging a change management methodology. First, systems thinking emphasizes the whole organization. It recognizes organizations are more than a collection of their parts they are whole entities. It is only when leaders understand the scope and complexity of the change proposed can they define the best approach and use of the methodology. Second, systems thinking balances structure with process. Burnes (1996, 2004) identified the importance of attention to the change process as a critical element of successful organizational change. Third, is system thinking's multidisciplinary approach reflects better our current understanding of the organizational and human response to change. Finally, Jackson (2003 p. 13) states "systems language has proven itself more useful for getting grips on real world management problems than that of any other single discipline."

Therefore the value of the methodology is not gained from looking and completing each individual step or task of the methodology but from viewing the application of the methodology within the context of the organization – understanding first the underlying assumptions, philosophies and responses to the change that created the need for a methodology. Then to apply the methodology first as a whole followed with the implementation of each of the individual components. It is only in viewing the system as a whole, recognizing and responding to the patterns and relationships, that successful change can be realized in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Cady & Dannemiller, 2005).

Figure 1 depicts the application of holistic thinking to the use of change management models and methodologies. In this conceptual model there is recognition that holistic system thinking contains two complimentary but different views of systems, hard systems and soft systems (Checkland & Scholes, 1990). Hard system thinking offers the opportunity for managers to isolate an approach and provides the structure necessary for facilitating change within an organization. However, while necessary hard system thinking is not sufficient for successful organizational change. Success also requires the application of soft systems thinking. Soft systems thinking enables the managers to create opportunities for conversation to evaluate perspectives of the opportunity/problem to stimulate learning and create purposeful action (Checkland, 2000; Jackson, 2003).

The translation from model to methodology also reflects the nature of hard and soft systems thinking. Change management models primarily conceptual in nature represent the soft systems thinking but as the model is translated into a series of steps and activity to define a methodology the focus shifts from the soft systems to hard systems thinking.

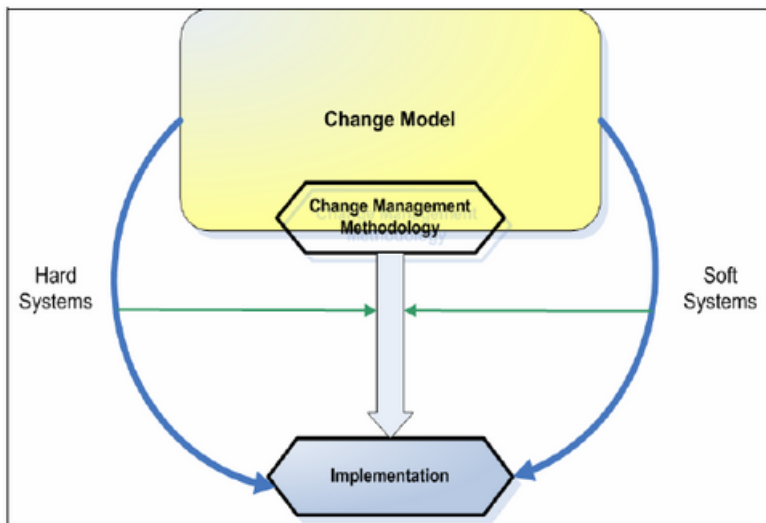


Figure 1: Holistic Systems Approach to Change Management Methodology







Beer and Nohria (2000) in their work to explore why so many change initiatives fail identified two typical approaches to change which they defined as theory E and theory O. Theory E approaches change from the perspective of the hard systems while theory O focuses on the soft systems of the organization. The authors note it is in the combination of the two theoretical approaches that organizations gain their greatest potential for success; “Companies that effectively combine hard and soft approaches to change can reap the big payoffs in profitability and productivity,” those companies are more likely to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage and ... reduce the anxiety that grips whole societies in the face of corporate restructuring” (Beer and Nohria 2000 p.134).



## Applying Holistic Approach to the Application of Change Management Methodology

The value of systems thinking is the permanence and flexibility it provides for organizations to adapt and respond to change (Haines,2000), but for organizational leaders attempting to implement change it becomes a question of practical application. Practically speaking leveraging a change management methodology requires organizational leaders to understand and apply synergistically the hard and soft systems of the organization (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Table 2 describes the synergy in the application of the hard and soft system activities in the application of a change management methodology.

**Table 2: The Application of Hard and Soft System Thinking to Change Management Methodology**

Hard Systems Implementation		Soft Systems Implementation
Define a desired outcome (Vision)		Create dialogue around desired outcome
Prescribe the Steps		Manage in between the steps
Manage the event		Facilitate the change process
Measure quantitative results		Measure qualitative results
Create structure		Experience participative management
Name the change		Experience the transition

When viewed from a systems perspective the organization is more than the sum of its part it is a “pattern of interrelationships among key components of the system...that might include the hierarchy, process flows, but it also includes the attitudes, perceptions, the quality of products the ways in which decisions are made and hundreds of other factors” (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994 p. 90).

## Conclusion

Graetz, Rimmer, Lawrence & Smith,(2002) suggest that in practice, managers need to understand the limitations of general change models and apply them with common sense. It would appear that change management practice does not need more change management methodologies– managers and leaders have a plethora of methodologies to choose from, all touting the reasons that one is better than the next. However, until managers have an understanding of the underlying mechanisms driving the techniques and tools within the methodology,the value of the methodology will elude them and they will continue to experience the high rate of failure.

Managers must gain a higher degree of comfort within the soft systems of the organization and learn to make the intangible tangible. As Doyle (2002) indicated, the experience of managing change is far more than the technical aspects of a methodology it encompasses

the social, political and emotional aspects of the organization. Therefore planning and preparing individuals to understand and work synergistically between the hard and soft systems of organizational change is imperative for the success of any change initiative. Without these skills individual change agents will be left to flounder in a sea of check boxes creating greater risk and potential loss for the organization.

We must challenge the conventional wisdom that soft systems thinking is somehow more casual or involves less rigor or attention to structure than hard systems thinking (Checkland, 2000). Soft systems offers another dimension to the leader's understanding of organizational change and once internalized follows the intuitive process that most leaders engage in when attempting to find a solution to a real problem or take advantage of a real opportunity. As Checkland (2000 p.545) stated "It is a more organized, more holistic form of what we do when we engage in serious conversations".

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Jacob is a senior partner at Implement MP AB in Stockholm, Sweden, focusing on change management consultancy. Jacob has more than 15 years of practical management experience from both service and manufacturing companies. Jacob is also a PhD student at Lulea University of Technology. His research interest focuses broadly on how to accelerate and execute organizational change, with a specific focus on process management based on systems thinking.

### *Helen Haley*

Helen Haley is an experienced change management practitioner and professional coach. In 2005 after 10 years experience in the corporate sector, Helen saw an opportunity to start a consulting organisation that would partner with client organisations to help them through the ever-increasing amount of significant change many were facing. Allegra Consulting was formed and today is one of Australia's leading Change Management consultancies supplying end-to-end change management services including strategic advice, change implementation and other human capital related services. Helen is a qualified professional Life Coach and an accredited member of the Life Coaching Academy. Helen is also a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

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