Creating a Sustainable Approach to Change: Building Organizational Change Capacity

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Introduction

A basic reality of the 21st century is that organizations and management are faced with unrelenting demands for change. Companies in every industry are increasingly challenged to both respond to and anticipate continuously changing competitive, market, technological, economic, and social conditions to the point where change is described as the “new normal” (Jørgensen, Owen, and Neus, 2008). Yet, despite this and a virtual explosion of research and managerial attention devoted to conceptualizing and empirically testing a range of change management practices (cf. Abrahamson, 2000; Armenakis and Harris, 2002, 2009; Beer, Eisenstat and Spector, 1990; de Caluwé and Vermaak, 2002; Higgs and Rowland, 2005; Kerber and Buono, 2005; King and Wright, 2007; Kotter, 1996; Kotter and Cohen, 2002), successful organizational change often remains elusive. A global business study by McKinsey underscores this problem, noting that only one-third of organizational change initiatives were viewed as successful by their leaders (Meaney and Pung, 2008). As a recent IBM white paper study suggests, the “change gap” (i.e., the gap between an organization’s expectation of change and its history of successfully managing it) has increased significantly over the past few years (see Jørgensen, et al., 2008).

On a general level, managers have grown increasingly comfortable with planned change, as organizational leaders rather than external specialists have taken increasingly active roles in bringing it about (cf. Aiken and Keller, 2007; Kotter and Cohen, 2002; Nadler, 1988). Indeed, more and more managers have become skilled at reacting to external forces, conceptualizing a preferred future state, and implementing the subsequent plan for achieving that well-defined end. In this context, however, change is largely viewed as linear and mechanistic, as a series of discrete events, and, at times, traumatic events that should be controlled to enable the organization to achieve its goals. Given the onslaught of changes that many organizations now face, this carefully planned, change-specific approach is quickly becoming inadequate. Success in rapidly changing environments often demands experimentation, improvisation, and the ability to cope with unanticipated occurrences and unintended repercussions (see, for example, Gersick, 1991; Meyer and Stensaker, 2006; Wheatley, 1992). In essence, companies increasingly face the challenge of sustaining continuous movement — sometimes fast, sometimes slow, sometimes with brief periods of constancy (e.g., Leana and Barry, 2000) — toward a largely unknown, emergent future state.

Creating a Foundation for Sustainable Change

The literature has a number of discussions of “change readiness,” a mental state that typically focuses on the extent to which organizational members’ beliefs, attitudes, and intentions reflect and recognize the need for a particular change at a specific point in time (e.g., Armenakis, Harris, and Mossio, 1993; Cawsey and Deszca, 2007; Miles, 1997; Neve, 2009; Smith, 1996). As this literature notes, attempts to enhance change readiness encompass a number of factors, including clarifying the underlying message for the change (needs, anticipated...
effects), mobilizing collective support for the change across the organization, and encouraging active participation in the change process.

Since such readiness is seen as fundamental to the successful management of change, given the constant state of flux in the business environment, some observers have suggested that a focus on facilitating continuous change readiness rather than on implementing and managing specific change efforts might be more productive (By, 2007; By; Diefenbach and Klarner, 2008). Given this emphasis, it is important to differentiate between change readiness and change capacity — the ability of an organization to change not just once, but as a normal response to changes in its environment (see, for example, Klarner, Probst, and Soparnot, 2008; Myers and Stensaker, 2006; White and Linden, 2002). Change capacity, a broader concept than change readiness, requires a much more extensive set of interventions. Such capacity implies a focus on multiple, often iterative and overlapping changes over time, which is different from the traditional view of change as a series of isolated events (Meyer and Stensaker, 2006). Change capacity is thus an ongoing capability that reflects (1) a dynamic process of continuous learning and adjustment, enabling the organization to thrive in the midst of ambiguity and uncertainty, and (2) the ability to implement those changes (Klarner, et al, 2008; Staber and Sydow, 2002).

Drawing on our field-based interventions and observations within the context of the change management literature, this article focuses on the challenge of developing a sustainable foundation for change by building organizational change capacity. As illustrated in Table 1, building organizational change capacity reflects three primary areas that encompass change-related processes: an organizational context that supports change, an organizational culture that facilitates learning, and implementation (cf. Gravenhorst, Werkman, and Boonstra, 2003; Klarner, et al, 2008). Building this capacity

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>FOCUS</th>
<th>OBJECTIVE</th>
<th>ILLUSTRATIVE ACTIONS</th>
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<tr>
<td>Organizational Members</td>
<td>Developing an understanding and acceptance of different change approaches</td>
<td>• Adopt a common, enterprise-wide framework for thinking and talking about change</td>
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<td>• Develop widespread knowledge about different approaches to change and when each is appropriate</td>
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<td>• Develop deep expertise about change in the organization</td>
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<td>• Provide change coaching and consulting services</td>
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<td>• Establish change agent networks to share best practices, tools and insights about changing</td>
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<td>• Debrief change initiatives with a focus on learning from experience</td>
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<td>Enhancing willingness and ability to change</td>
<td>• Select, hire, evaluate and reward people based on their ability to thrive on change</td>
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<td>• Form diverse teams to encourage innovation and creativity</td>
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<td>• Develop, reward and promote supervisors and managers who enable change</td>
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<td>• Enhance the personal credibility of organizational leaders</td>
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<td>• Listen to, encourage, and reward mavericks and trailblazers</td>
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<td>• Create a climate of trust, honesty, and transparency</td>
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<td>Structure</td>
<td>Building a change-supportive infrastructure</td>
<td>Providing appropriate resources</td>
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<td>• Frequent meetings to identify and critically assess opportunities</td>
<td>• Designate an owner of the goal to develop change capacity</td>
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<td>• Encourage low-cost experiments with new ideas</td>
<td>• Devote resources to continually scanning the environment for new ideas</td>
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<td>• Recognize and reward those who support, encourage, lead and share learning about change</td>
<td>• Encourage external contact with stakeholders, especially with customers</td>
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<td>• Creation of a fluid structure that allows the easy formation of new groups</td>
<td>• Appoint committed change sponsors for specific initiatives</td>
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<td>• Creation of systems to share knowledge, information and learning across boundaries</td>
<td>• Target key change initiatives with enough resources to get public successes</td>
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<td>• Responsive and proactive training and education</td>
<td>• Shelter breakthroughs with their own budgets and people</td>
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<td>Culture</td>
<td>Creating a change-facilitative culture</td>
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<td>• Emphasize learning and information sharing</td>
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<td>• Encourage questions and experiments</td>
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<td>• Value alternative viewpoints</td>
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<td>• Tolerance for mistakes in the interest of learning</td>
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<td>• Stakeholder orientation</td>
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<td>• Shared purpose with a common language about change</td>
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<td>Ensuring ongoing strategizing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Create a shared purpose</td>
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<td>• Think dynamically and systemically so that strategies can change quickly</td>
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<td>• Examine future markets, competitors, and opportunities</td>
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<td>• Factor future scenarios into today’s decisions</td>
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<td>• String together a series of momentary advantages</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Create and communicate a change friendly identity, both internally and externally</td>
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Table 1. Building Organizational Change Capacity (Continued)

requires interventions focused on organizational members (understanding and accepting different approaches to change; enhancing willingness and ability to change), structure (creating a change supportive infrastructure, ensuring appropriate resources), and culture (building a facilitative culture, ongoing strategizing). In essence, building change capacity involves a systemic approach to tap into people’s natural capacity to change by supporting change and
Table 2. Differentiating Approaches to Managing Change

<table>
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<tr>
<th>DIMENSIONS</th>
<th>DIRECTED CHANGE</th>
<th>PLANNED CHANGE</th>
<th>GUIDED CHANGING</th>
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<tr>
<td>Characteristics</td>
<td>Top-down, hierarchical</td>
<td>Linear, “road map”</td>
<td>Iterative spiral</td>
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<tr>
<td>Change Goals (Ends)</td>
<td>Tightly defined, unchanging goal</td>
<td>Clear goal, with some modification as needed</td>
<td>Loosely defined direction</td>
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<td>Change Process (Means)</td>
<td>Tightly constrained</td>
<td>Flexible, participative</td>
<td>Experimental, improvisation</td>
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<td>Change Leadership (Role)</td>
<td>Tell, order, command</td>
<td>Devise a plan to accomplish the goal</td>
<td>Point the way, guide and watch over, instruct</td>
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<tr>
<td>Changemaker Dynamics</td>
<td>Persuasion</td>
<td>Influence, cooperation</td>
<td>Collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pace of Change</td>
<td>Urgent, fast, “just do it”</td>
<td>Go slow during planning to go fast during implementation</td>
<td>Act quickly, improvise, learn, react and continue to iterate</td>
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making it a basic part of organizational life.

**Intervening with organizational members**

An important first step in building organizational change capacity is to enhance organizational members’ understanding about change and the various ways in which it can be dealt with, with the goal of enhancing their willingness and ability to change.

- *Conceptualizing different approaches to change*

  From a conceptual vantage point, there are three basic, interrelated approaches to implementing organizational change: directed change, planned change and guided change (see Table 2; Kerber and Buono, 2005). **Directed change** is driven from the top of the organization and relies on authority, persuasion, and compliance. Leaders create and announce the change and seek to convince organizational members to accept it based on business necessity, logical arguments (rational persuasion), emotional appeals, and the leader’s credibility. **Directed change** is a quick, decisive way to introduce change.

  **Planned change**, which has become an increasingly popular approach, may arise from any level in the organization but ultimately is sponsored by the top. Change leaders and implementers seek involvement in and commitment to the change by making extensive use of specific actions, identified through research and experience, which mitigate the typical resistance and productivity losses associated with directed change (e.g., Beckhard and Pritchard, 1992; Beer and Nohria, 2000; Kotter, 1996; LaMarsh, 1995). Underlying most planned change efforts is the Lewinian three-stage process of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing: 1) unfreezing or releasing the organization from its current patterns, 2) transitioning the resulting, more malleable, organization from its current patterns to more adaptive ones, and then 3) refreezing the organization into a new set of patterns by weaving them into the fabric of the organization (Lewin, 1951; Weick and Quinn, 1999). Instead
of simply creating and announcing a change, planned change provides a “roadmap.” It attempts to create the conditions for key stakeholders to become more involved in both the form and implementation of the change.

A very different approach is guided change, an emergent process that can start at any location within the organization. It is based on the commitment and contribution of organizational members to the organization’s purpose. In the context of the overlapping changes that are characteristic of today’s hypercompetitive environment, this approach attempts to take full advantage of the expertise and creativity of organizational members, reconfiguring existing practices and models and testing new ideas and perspectives. As illustrated by the spiral in Table 2, guided changing is an iterative process of initial interpretation and design, implementation and improvisation, learning from the change effort, and then sharing that learning system-wide, leading to ongoing re-interpretation and redesign of the change as needed. The resulting spiral of learning, innovation and development contributes to both continuous improvement of existing change efforts as well as the ability to generate novel changes and solutions.

As suggested, each of these approaches has advantages but each has disadvantages as well. For example, when directed change is used inappropriately, organizational members are forced to cope with the well-known reactions of the recipients of the imposed change — denial, anger, bargaining, sadness, and loss (e.g., Kubler-Ross, 1969; Marks, 2003; Nabbandian, 1985). Similarly, while planned change creates an important capability in today’s organizations, used inappropriately it can still result in significant reductions in productivity, overwhelm organizational members with its complexity, and alienate key stakeholders as a result of limited participation and influence in the process. A related limitation with planned change is the lack of flexibility in the face of changing conditions. As experience has shown, planned change efforts often constrain the ability of the organization to achieve its intended goals (e.g., Abrahamson, 2000; By, et al, 2008; Kerber, 2001). Moreover, the burden for initiating and sustaining the change is still placed directly on organizational leaders, from identifying the need for change and creating a vision of desired outcomes to deciding which changes are ultimately feasible. Finally, our experience suggests that guided changing, if used inappropriately, can contribute to organizational chaos, as continuous changes and transitions confuse and frustrate rather than enlighten organizational members and other key stakeholders. The need to constantly adapt and adjust — the idea of “living in beta” (Wilson, 2008) — can be a daunting experience. A related resource issue is that repeated iterations could easily burn up a fair amount of time and other resources without necessarily finishing the process and moving on to the next change. Many people ultimately want organizational change to end rather than become a perpetual state of affairs.

- **Acceptance of different approaches to change**

  Since each of these change management approaches has advantages and disadvantages, developing true change capacity requires the ability to choose among them as dictated by the situation. Two key factors influence the appropriateness of each of these approaches to change: business complexity and socio-technical uncertainty (see Figure 1, Kerber and Buono, 2005).

  **Business complexity** refers to the intricacy of the system, in essence, the number of components and extent of differentiation in the organization in which the change is to be implemented. While there are no precise demarcation points between low and high business complexity, indicators include such factors as size and geographical dispersion, the nature of interdependencies and related technology, the number of products and services, and the array of critical stakeholders. The degree of business complexity increases 1) the more change cuts across different hierarchical levels, different work units, and different geographic locations; 2) when reciprocal or team interdependence is involved; 3) the wider the range of products and services; and 4) when the buy-in of a number of internal and external stakeholders is required. Therefore, the focus is on the relative complexity of implementing the change solution and what is needed to successfully introduce and sustain the change overtime.

  **Socio-technical uncertainty** refers to the amount and nature of information processing and decision making required for the change, based on the extent to which the tasks involved are determined, established, or exactly known. Some tasks are clearly analyzable, where work processes can be reduced to repeatable steps. In these instances, organizational members can be directed to follow objective, standardized
procedures based on technical knowledge and managerial expertise. As the change challenge and its solution become less clear and the appropriate solution more difficult to identify, such directed or planned approaches begin to break down. In these instances, there is no organizational repertoire of suitable techniques or procedures, and organizational members must draw on their own judgment, intuition, and expertise. Lacking precise demarcation points between low and high socio-technical uncertainty, situations can be described as varying in the extent to which there are 1) clearly known ways to approach the situation, 2) an understandable sequence of steps that can be followed, and 3) an identifiable set of established procedures and practices (see Daft, 2001; Perrow, 1970). In low socio-technical uncertainty situations, the solution to the change challenge is known, but when socio-technical uncertainty is high, the solution is not known or even fully understood, and neither is the problem. The search for a solution occurs simultaneously with the search for a clear definition of the problem.

When deciding on an appropriate approach to implementing organizational change, the primary driver of the shift from directed change to planned change is increasing business complexity, while the shift to guided changing is driven by the degree of socio-technical uncertainty. As the dynamics of a particular situation change — the relative business complexity or socio-technical uncertainty — the approach to implementing the change should also evolve. For example, once an appropriate solution to a guided changing challenge has emerged (in essence, decreasing the socio-technical uncertainty involved), implementation should then shift to a planned or directed change approach, based on the relative business complexity of the situation and urgency of the required change.

- Enhancing change willingness and ability
Much like the idea of emergent change, it is more effective if the motivation to seek different approaches to change comes from the organization and its members. While managers may have the ability to undertake such change, they are often unwilling to accept, and are uncomfortable with, the idea of ongoing iteration and improvisation. Therefore, in getting managers to think more fully about the challenges associated with organizational change, it is typically most effective to begin where they are likely to be most comfortable: enhancing organizational understanding of how to successfully lead planned change in their specific context. As part of such discussions, managers typically begin to see the need for a more iterative approach to change as they wrestle with problems and issues that are
not clearly defined.

In exploring the reasons underlying their frustration, organizational members typically point to situations from their own experience that started with little more than a general direction and lacked a clearly defined end state because the solution (or outcome) was not determined or exactly known. As organizational members discuss the nature of the problems they face, they also begin to question the limits of planned change. This process can be facilitated by completing a diagnostic questionnaire that assesses the nature of the problem the organization is facing (focused on relative business complexity, socio-technical uncertainty and organizational constraints). At this point, it is useful to prompt managers to think about the challenges and skills necessary to move forward in dealing with highly complex and uncertain problems — reinforcing the ways in which business complexity and socio-technical uncertainty influence change-management dynamics.

Moving from directed to planned change to guided changing — and back and forth, as needed — involves significant competence transfer from executives and managers to organizational members as the latter become, in effect, the new change leaders. The transition from directed or planned change to guided changing, in particular, can pose a significant challenge for executives and organizational members who are both accustomed to having executives lead change. While resistance is clearly related to instances where people feel change is being thrust upon them, especially when change is associated with loss (Nalbandian, 1985), a downside of carefully orchestrated change is that it might create an artificial sense of security among organizational members that could limit reflection (Werr, Stjernberg and Docherty, 1997) and, as a result, suppress the type of learning and improvisation necessary for successful guided changing. Organizational members may also be reluctant to accept responsibility for identifying the nature of a required change. There is a certain comfort in having leaders say, “This is the problem, this is the solution.” At the same time, one of the greatest challenges to the implementation of this type of emergent, guided change may be the unwillingness of upper-level managers to let go of tight management control and embrace a messy, dynamic process that can involve the entire organization (see Bly, et al, 2008; Buono and Kerber, 2008).

To enhance the willingness and ability of organizational members to embrace change, companies can place greater emphasis on selecting, hiring, evaluating, and rewarding people based on their ability to thrive on change. As a way of encouraging innovation and creativity, firms can also create and support highly diverse teams — prompting, listening to, and rewarding mavericks and trailblazers, so-called “positive deviants” who “transcend the conventional wisdoms, discovering new and innovative ways to function without creating conflict” (Seidman and McCauley, 2008). Finally, as part of an effort to enhance the personal credibility of organizational leaders, it is important to create a climate of trust, honesty, and transparency. Persuasive and ethical communication is critical, ensuring both the clarity of the message and the honesty and trustworthiness of managers and executives. If organizational members do not trust the change implementer and his or her message, their acceptance of the change is unlikely.

Building a change-supportive infrastructure

Directed change involves telling people what to do and how to do it, with little or no opportunity for input about or modification of the goal or process. In such instances, the infrastructure supporting the change and the resources that are required for successful change tend to be minimal. Even so, an important dimension of directed change communication is the ability to respond to the “so that” question: “We are changing X so that we will be able to accomplish Y.” Organizational members should fully understand the reason, rationale and expected outcome of the change (see Ulrich, Zenger and Smallwood, 1999). While this approach is effective in low complexity or low uncertainty situations, it can severely limit the development of an organization facing more complex and uncertain changes.

In confronting these latter instances, guided changing involves identifying an overall direction and then giving people the opportunity to modify and redefine both the change goal and process as needed. This approach requires open and lavish communication across individuals and groups to succeed, with flexible systems and processes to support improvisation and iteration, cross-boundary meetings to identify and critically assess new opportunities, and responsive and proactive training and development that
gives organizational members the requisite skills for such continual learning and experimentation. It is also important to have a fluid structure that allows groups to be formed and dissolved as needed, encouraging an open sharing of information, knowledge, and learning across departmental and work unit boundaries. Traditional planning and communication strategies, which typically serve as the basic mechanism for work group-related coordination, fall short of supporting the type of dynamic interactions and adjustments that contribute to the ongoing collaboration required for more iterative processes (see Rico, Sanchez-Manzanares, Gil, and Gibson, 2008). The infrastructure should also encourage low-cost experimentation with new ideas. Sometimes referred to as “no-budget knowledge management” (Hardy, 2007), emphasis is placed on carrying out multiple initiatives that simultaneously improvise, test, and iterate solutions and new directions. Once a breakthrough emerges, however, effort must be protected with its own budget and people.

Within this context, appropriate resources to support the change are critical. In addition to sufficient time, people, and financial resources, mindshare is essential. When people feel overloaded and overwhelmed by organizational tasks and responsibilities, they are often reluctant to engage in the type of experimentation, improvisation, and learning that is characteristic of guided change. As part of this process, it is also useful to designate an “owner” of the goal to develop organizational change capacity, a role that serves not only as change champion but also as someone to ensure appropriate sponsorship for different initiatives. Resources must also be available to continually scan the environment for new ideas, encouraging contact with external stakeholders (e.g., customers).

Creating a culture of change

While organizations typically emphasize stability, predictability, and execution, a change-facilitative culture embraces fluidity, openness, and learning (see Lawler and Worley, 2006; McLagan, 2003). Breaking free of organizational traditions and familiar rules and operating procedures is, of course, not easy. Indeed, the power of custom and status quo reinforce cultures that forestall the types of adjustments — especially in terms of agility and flexibility — that organizational members need to embrace in unstable environments (see Thompson, 1994). At the same time, a change-facilitative culture recognizes that more traditional approaches to change may remain appropriate in certain circumstances. It is imperative, therefore, that all organizational members become better informed about the advantages and limitations of different approaches to change as well as the broader context for the change itself as they develop a shared framework for thinking and talking about it. In essence, the organization must strive to create a shared purpose supported by a common language about change.

As part of this process, managers at all levels should be encouraged to embrace a stakeholder orientation that emphasizes learning and information sharing, encourages questions and experiments, values alternative viewpoints and tolerates mistakes in the interest of learning. A focus on simply getting things done — and done right the first time — can quickly crowd out the type of reflection and experimentation that is increasingly vital to success in today’s rapidly changing, competitive environment (see Edmondson, 2008).

A related macro-level factor that affects organizational change capacity involves the organization’s approach to strategy. In contrast to traditional approaches, Lawler and Worley (2006) emphasize the importance of making “strategizing” the normal condition. This approach involves thinking dynamically, focusing on the future, and stringing together a series of momentary advantages, rather than attempting to achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. Although a high-change capacity organization certainly requires a shared purpose to provide overall direction, strategies for achieving that shared purpose can change quickly based on scenarios involving future markets, competitors, and opportunities. Combined with the type of change-facilitative organizational culture discussed previously, this dynamic approach to strategizing encourages the organization to keep pace with, if not anticipate, external changes that are critical to business success.

Organizations must create a shared understanding through which their members 1) are encouraged to think dynamically and systematically so that strategies can change quickly, 2) are supported in their efforts to think about future markets, competitors, and opportunities, and 3) are prompted to factor future scenarios into today’s decisions. In general, an underlying goal is to create and communicate a change-friendly identity, internally and externally.
A case illustration: building change capacity
An example of this approach recently occurred in an intervention in GlobalCom, a multi-billion dollar global technology leader focused on information infrastructure technologies, services, and solutions that was facing a long-term, complex problem with uncertain dimensions. During a workshop in which different approaches to change were examined (see Table 2), the senior management team wrestled with how to best implement a large-scale planned change that would revamp the process through which GlobalCom’s services were delivered to customers. In discussing the business complexity involved in such a massive undertaking, and drawing on the diagnostic questionnaire mentioned earlier, it became increasingly clear that the company was also dealing with a higher level of socio-technical uncertainty than initially realized. As they probed the nature of the problem, it became more and more apparent that a planned change approach would fall short of what was needed, especially in terms of gathering input from their global field-based workforce, assessing local practices and preferred service delivery strategies, evaluating and assessing this information in light of customer needs and workforce expectations, and determining an appropriate cost structure and level of service uniformity. During the discussion, the group revisited the idea of guided changing — initial interpretation and design, implementation and improvisation, learning from the change effort, sharing that learning system-wide, then moving to reinterpretation and redesign and so forth — using the iterative process to think through how the new service delivery model could be created and better integrated across all of the key areas of the company. Emphasis was placed on supporting improvisation and shared learning throughout the organization.

As part of their analysis, the senior management team further examined GlobalCom’s overall capacity for change, noting that the constraints they were operating under fell short of the change demands of the situation. Based on their continued assessment of GlobalCom’s change capacity (drawing on a questionnaire based on the illustrative actions in Table 1), the discussion turned to issues surrounding structure and culture and how they could begin to build a foundation that would facilitate an organization-wide commitment to an integrated service delivery model as well as other changes that would likely follow. This questionnaire was intended as a “semi-finished” instrument (see Lobnig, 2009), with the goal of stimulating deep, ongoing conversations between team members, pushing toward new learnings, new mindsets, and new skills for building greater change capacity within their organization. The underlying objective was to help the management team frame the complexity they were dealing with, assisting them in translating the related uncertainty into grounded, concrete actions. As others have noted (e.g., Armenakis, et al, 1993; Armenakis and Harris, 2009; Gravenhorst, et al, 2003), such questionnaires can be very useful in change-related assessments, for discovery as much as confirmation purposes.

Drawing on this assessment, an important part of the senior management team’s commitment to the change effort was to develop a plan to track the progress of the change and continually assess the extent to which GlobalCom was building appropriate commitment to and support for the initiative. These assessments would then guide the planning for additional interventions to build the organization’s capacity for both large-scale and ongoing, smaller changes.

A next step was to create a series of workshops and webinars on “Mastering Change” that would capture this way of thinking, disseminating it to the world-wide workforce, encouraging middle-managers and the field-based service delivery personnel to explore, test, and capture leading practices, and share that learning on a system-wide basis. The workshops were also used to encourage organizational members to think more analytically about the organizational change challenges they faced in their work. Participants assessed which approach to change they thought was most appropriate for the challenges they were facing. By assessing the relative business complexity and socio-technical uncertainty associated with their particular situation, and the concomitant infrastructure and culture needs, the managers were quite capable of determining how they should approach the change in question. Discussion also focused on working at the boundaries, as the types of change challenges and strategies often blur together in practice.

At this point, the intervention and process of creating the new services delivery model and way of thinking about organizational change are still in progress. To date, however, workshop participants have reported success in using this approach to conceptualize, plan, and implement change within their sphere of influence.
Meanwhile, GlobalCom’s senior management team began to realize from their own experience that planned change, while necessary and effective in many situations, was not necessarily sufficient for all situations. At the same time, they realized that as the plan for the integrated service delivery system was created through the iterative process, a planned change approach would probably be needed to ensure world-wide implementation, with the need to continually revisit possibilities as their markets, resources, and customer needs evolved. In essence, they foresaw an ongoing iteration between guided changing and planned change in formulating new approaches and implementing them system-wide. Through their analysis, the senior management team also began to realize that the ability of the organization to accept and implement these different approaches to change required appropriate resources, a change-supportive infrastructure, and a culture that emphasized the importance of ongoing strategizing and changing.

**Change Capacity and Sustainable Change**

Organizations and their management are quite capable of creating a sustainable foundation for implementing change if they focus the appropriate attention and resources on enhancing their change capacity. As discussed in this article, this effort requires interventions focused on organizational members, structural considerations, and culture. Our experience suggests that once organizational members begin to understand the various approaches to change and the concept of organizational change capacity, they are quite capable of determining the appropriate change approach — moving back and forth between directed and planned change and guided changing as necessary — if given the opportunity and support.

The approach and intervention described here helped GlobalCom’s senior management team to appreciate more fully the complexity and uncertainty of the task they were facing and to understand that the complexity and uncertainty surrounding that task required a more patient and involving approach than they had used in the past. More often than not, management teams approach highly complex and uncertain tasks with the same mindset and techniques they always use, which often leads them to underestimate the difficulty and, as a result, under-resource the effort in terms of time, money, support, and so forth. This type of approach not only contributes to organizational chaos and role overload, but can also create cynicism among organizational members about impending changes, undermining the support and commitment necessary for success.

When moving from directed change to planned change to guided changing, managers must be willing to give up control based on rules, procedures, and tight supervision and substitute an approach based on overall direction, principles, values, and commitment. At the same time, as the socio-technical uncertainty involved in the change is gradually resolved, organizational members must be willing to accept follow-on planned or directed changes as dictated by the business complexity and degree of urgency. A shared purpose, supported by a common understanding and language about organizational change, can readily facilitate such transitions and support a more sustainable approach.

Unfortunately, organizations are all too frequently constrained by infrastructures, cultures, and strategies that are based on a need for control and predictability rather than on the needs of a rapidly changing environment. Companies and managers, however, can no longer afford to rely on *ad hoc* approaches that are always controlled from above, in essence creating “self-sabotaging traps” that undermine their ability to effectively bring about needed changes in their organizations (cf. Edmondson, 2008; Jørgensen, et al, 2008). The key is to encourage and support managers to broaden their change implementation repertoire by developing a common understanding of the dynamics of organizational change, building a change-supportive infrastructure, and creating and nurturing a change-facilitative culture. This approach can help to create what Abrahamson (2000) refers to as “change without fatal pain,” paving the way for “change that succeeds.” Although successful organizational change may seem to be an elusive quest, the ability to execute change on a sustainable basis is achievable if organizations invest in developing their change capacity.

**NOTES**

1. The authors have developed two diagnostic questionnaires to facilitate the analysis discussed in the article, based on (1) the complexity, uncertainty and organizational constraints involved in a particular change, and (2) the various factors involved in building organizational change capacity (based on
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