

Changing organizations

Understanding complexity, not denying it

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Abstract

Despite innumerable efforts of scientists and practitioners to understand it better, organizational change remains a complex process. Little extensive empirical research has been done to understand the problems in introducing change and the reasons underlying failure to change. In this study, we examine organizational change from multiple perspectives and distinguish five configurations in the change capacity of organizations. These configurations are based on research conducted in more than 300 business units or enterprises in The Netherlands. Unique and coherent aspects of change processes, organizational aspects and change perceptions characterize each of the configurations. The five configurations are related to specific context factors and change strategies. They demonstrate that we should address barriers to organizational change from multiple perspectives if we really want to comprehend what hinders and helps organizations change

Keywords

Organizational Change, Management of Change, Change capacity, Strategies for change

Introduction

It is a common statement that organizational change tends to lead to unsatisfactory results. Outcomes of change processes are often different from what was planned and new projects are started before previous ones have been finished properly. Change processes are sometimes cancelled deliberately or they lose importance and dissolve slowly. Managers are unable to establish a sense of urgency for change, change programs go either too fast or too slow, change objectives are incoherent or too abstract, leaders are either too powerful or have too little authority, and so on (cf. Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990; Kotter, 1996; Pfeffer, 1992; Boonstra, 2004a; Beer & Nohria, 2000). Much has been written in recent decades about why change processes often fail. For instance, we know much more about the sense and senselessness of organizational change (Zorn, Christensen & Cheney, 1999), the limitations of bureaucracies (Mintzberg, 1983), innovative and conservative organizational cultures (Schein, 1992), resistance to change (Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994), and the way change processes are organized and managed (French & Bell, 1995; Kanter, 1983). Extensive empirical research on the subject, however, is relatively scarce. Besides offering little empirical evidence of implementers' specific activities, literature prematurely moves to recommendations without empirical evidence, and represents an overly top down orientation (Lewis & Seibold, 1998). In addition, the frameworks used by many experts in the field of organizational change to analyze and explain why change in organizations is so complicated usually focus on a single explanation. The reasons underlying the difficulties in implementing change are thought to be either goals and strategy, or culture, leadership, technology, political behavior, change management or resistance to change. Each scientific discipline tends to go off on its own favorite topic (cf. Kerber & Buono, 2004). The common view of empirical research is that researchers should be able to explain the core of a problem in a relatively simple, manageable manner. Complex approaches to change and heterogeneous perspectives, which pay attention to multiple explanations and relationships between factors, are relatively rare in empirical research. Change may however best be understood by analysis of overall patterns (Greenwood & Hinings, 1993; Miller & Friesen, 1984).

In this article we present a research project in which change processes were investigated from a heterogeneous perspective in a large number of organizations, paying special attention to the interrelatedness of aspects of organizations, change strategies and change processes. We used survey research to explore the patterns and regularities in change management approaches, the context of change, and the choices of change managers for a specific change strategy in internationally operating Dutch organizations. We also examined the different perspectives of organization members on aspects of change approaches, strategies and contexts. Our goal was to gain insight into why change processes are often so toilsome, by addressing the goals of change processes, the way they are managed, the change context, the choices made by change managers for a specific change approach, and the differences in perspectives between groups of actors in change processes. We concentrated on second-order change processes: serious, far-reaching change processes in which a transition occurs from a known starting point to a desired end point. In these transitions, people are confronted with non-routine problems which often concern the attunement between the organization and its environment. These non-routine factors and the complexity of these change processes make problems and solutions unclear. As a result, change management and strategies become more important.

Six issues are addressed in this article. Firstly, we examine configurations in aspects of organizations, change processes and perception of change. Secondly, we examine patterns in changing organizations. These two issues give insight into groups of organizations sharing a common profile of organization and change characteristics, combined with functions of ideas, beliefs and values (cf. Meyer, Tsui & Hinings, 1993; Greenwood & Hinings, 1993). Thirdly, we contrast perspectives of actors in change processes. Fourthly, we discuss the limits of entitative thinking in explaining failure to change and reflect on the relation between organization members' position in the organization, the role they play in change processes, and change strategy. Fifthly, we elaborate on choices for effective change strategies. Finally, we discuss the theoretical and practical meaning of our findings and some new research questions.

Measures

Change capacity

To gain insight into the aspects of organizations and change processes that hinder change, we used a questionnaire developed and described by Bennebroek Gravenhorst (2002). This questionnaire was developed on the basis of insights of practitioners as well as on literature about the barriers and success factors in change processes (cf. Kotter, 1996; Pettigrew, Ferlie & McKee, 1992; Kanter, Stein & Jick, 1992; Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990). These insights suggest that aspects of organizations as well as of the management of change processes and support for change can hinder change. When moving from a current situation to a new one, it is important to evaluate how an organization functions (Harrison, 1987). The current situation in an organization can contribute to or reduce its capacity for change. In innovative organizations, for example, employees are familiar with change and they actively strive for it, whereas in bureaucratic organizations, management strives for stability, therefore hindering change within the organization (Schein, 1992). Characteristics of the organization are therefore considered factors that can potentially hinder or contribute to change. The six characteristics we evaluated to determine an organization's change capacity are: (1) goals and strategy, (2) structure, (3) culture and leadership, (4) technology, (5) job characteristics, and (6) power relations. These characteristics are interrelated, and change in one affects the others (Boonstra, 2004a; Cummings, 2004; Levin, 2004).

Besides organizational characteristics, the design and management of change processes also have a crucial impact on the change capacity of organizations (Buelens & DeVos, 2004; Carnall, 2004; Walton & Russell, 2004; French & Bell, 1995; Kanter et.al, 1992). We therefore also incorporated aspects of the change process in our research. The ten aspects of the change process we evaluated are: (1) goals and strategy of the change, (2) technological aspects, (3) tensions within and between groups in the organization, (4) the timing of the process, (5) information supply, (6) generation of support for

the change, (7) the role of change managers, (8) the role of line managers, (9) expected outcome, and (10) support for change.

The questionnaire has sixteen scales, described in Table 1. Each scale consists of three to eight statements that were averaged. Respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale, ranging from -2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree), to what degree each of the 79 statements applies to the situation in their organizations. The -2 to 2 distinction makes it easier to read the graphed results, because disagreement with a statement is displayed as a negative contribution to change capacity and agreement as a positive contribution (see Figure 1).

Table 1: Scale Descriptions of the Change Capacity of Organizations Questionnaire and Sample Statements

ORGANIZATION	
Goals and strategy	Clearness of the goals of an organization, agreement about these goals, external orientation of its strategy, and degree of flexibility to deal with market demands and developments outside the organization. Example: The goals our organization wishes to attain are clear to me.
Technology	Available technology, clearness of the use of supporting systems, and usefulness of information technology for work procedures. Example: Our information technology supports our work well.
Structure	The organization of work and decision making about operations in an organization. Example: Work in our organization is subject to many rules and procedures.
Culture and leadership	This scale refers to opportunities for innovation, people-oriented leadership, and cooperation within an organization. Example: Employees are satisfied with consultations with their line manager.
Work	Workload, quality of work, relationships with colleagues, and career perspectives in an organization. Example: Organization members' knowledge and skills are exploited well.
Political relations	The interests of individuals and departments or teams, the division of influence, and the degree of competition in an organization. Example: Departments focus mainly on their own interests.
CHANGES	
Change course	Clearness of the change objectives, agreement about these objectives and understanding of the change strategy. Example: The goals of the change process are clear.
Technology	Complexity of technological adjustments, capacity for implementation of adjustments, and available technological support to effectuate the change. Example: Technological or IT systems are difficult to adjust.
Information	Amount and clarity of information about the change process and how an organization supplies this information. Example: The information about the change process is clear.
Tension	Tensions between and within teams or departments of an organization resulting from the change and pressure on the existing culture. Example: The change process leads to increased tension between departments.
Timing	Phasing and pace of the change process, clarity of phases, time for each phase and time to adopt the change, and the speed of the decision making process concerning the change. Example: Too much is being changed at the same time.
Creating support	Support from top managers, opportunities people have to influence the course of the change process, involvement of departments (and Work Council) in change processes, coaching of employees, possibilities for sharing experiences. Example: There is enough attention for organization member's ideas on the change process.
Change management	The competence of the change managers, their visibility, their attention for conflicting interests and communication between change managers and employees. Example: Change managers manage the change process well.
Line managers	The role of line managers in the change process, the way they deal with the change and the realization of goals, and the interaction with and involvement of their subordinates during the change process. Example: Line managers pay enough attention to conflicting interests within departments.
CHANGE PERCEPTION	
Expected outcome	Expectations of employees regarding the development and outcomes of the change process. Example: The change process has advantages for organization members.
Support for change	Perceived necessity for the change and the desire of people to actively contribute to the change process. Example: Organization members consider the change process necessary.

Change strategies

Besides organizational and change process characteristics, many authors consider change strategy an important factor in determining an organization's effectiveness in changing (Buelens & DeVos, 2004; De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004; Wierdsma, 2004; Kerber & Buono, 2004; Ghoshal & Bartlett, 2000; Stacey, 1996). Therefore, change strategies are also incorporated as a factor. Different strategies reflect and are characterized by large differences in underlying assumptions about organizing and changing. Conceptual clarity about the meaning of strategy is therefore important if we want to understand and make communication processes between actors in changing organizations visible (De Caluwé & Vermaak, 2004). In addition, the choice for a strategy is influenced by the extent to which a change context is certain and predictable and stakeholders agree about how to manage change (Kerber & Buono, 2004). Uncertain situations hinder planning and control. In these contexts, interactive change strategies may become important (cf. Stacey, 1996). We used a questionnaire aimed at gaining insight into employees' perspectives on used change strategies (Werkman, 2005). Five change strategies were addressed in this questionnaire: power strategy, systematic change strategy, negotiation strategy, programmatic change strategy and dialogue. Each scale consists of three to eight statements that were averaged. Again, respondents were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale, ranging from -2 (strongly disagree) to 2 (strongly agree), to what degree each of the 22 statements applies to the situation in their organizations. The five strategy scales are described in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Scale descriptions of the Change Strategy Questionnaire and Sample Statements

STRATEGY	
Power strategy	Controlled, top-down approach: employees are not involved in problem diagnosis, have little influence in development of change propositions, management of change permits few possibilities for input from employees, top management does not pay attention to workers' opinions, and changes are being carried through despite workers' opinions. Example: Change management leaves few possibilities for organization members' own initiatives.
Systematic change strategy	Systematic and methodological change approach: fixed goals, a model or design as a starting point for a new situation, fixed procedures and methods for change realization, fixed planning for phases in the process, time control and deadlines. Example: A design or model has been developed as the goal for the new situation.
Negotiation strategy	Approach aimed at negotiation about wishes and interests: Opposed interests are made visible and receive attention, wishes and interest are subject to negotiation, problems with changes are open to discussion, there is consultation and discussion about changes between departments. Example: Negotiation is used to come to agreement about wishes of different groups in the organization.
Programmatic change strategy	Stepwise, iterative approach: change approach is adapted to the course of change, to employees' work obligations and to the change capacity of the organization and people in the organization, changes and change approaches are being evaluated and adjusted in the process and the approach offers employees possibilities for learning to manage change themselves. Example: Changes are being evaluated so that change approach or goals can be adjusted.
Dialogue	Interactive approach: employees' ideas and opinions about changing are the primary starting point in formulating change proposals, changes and change approaches are developed together, different ideas and opinions are shared. Example: The change approach was developed by employees and managers together.

Change context

Change managers' choice for a particular change strategy is influenced by their perspective and interpretation of the change context (Kerber & Buono, 2004; Stacey, 1996). Different context characteristics, such as sector and organization size may be important factors in determining the success of change initiatives. We have included several items that give insight into the context of change processes in the questionnaire¹ (Table 3).

¹ We included more context factors, like phase of change and educational level of respondents, in our analyses. In this article, only those factors significantly contributing to the solution are mentioned.

TABLE 3 Items in the context questionnaire

	Context item
1.	Profit, non-profit or governmental organization
2.	Sector
3.	Number of organization members experiencing consequences
4.	Organization size
5.	Goal of changes
6.	Initiative for change
7.	Working parties
8.	Position of respondent in the organization
9.	Organization members experiencing consequences in their work

Methods

Data and sample

Data were collected using the networks of three Dutch management training institutes. Consultants and change managers participating in postgraduate change management courses distributed most of the questionnaires. All participants in these courses were asked to fill out the questionnaire themselves and to distribute four copies within their organizations among top management, line managers, staff members and employees. We thus collected five questionnaires per organization. We provided feedback on the results in the postgraduate courses or in separate meetings. This feedback consisted of a graphic evaluation of the change process (cf. Figure 1), discussions about the underlying causes of factors impeding change, and suggestions for improvement. In general, participants found it easy to interpret their graphs and recognized outcomes as representing general opinions within their organizations. In the final data set, about 300 business units of about 400 organizations are represented in 2164 questionnaires. Profit organizations constitute about 40 percent of our dataset, while the remaining 60 percent is about evenly distributed between governmental and non-profit organizations.

Objectives of change processes

In general, change process goals are both internally and externally oriented. Internally oriented goals are for instance improving efficiency, saving costs, and business process redesign. Externally oriented change processes are aimed at improving the capacity to meet contemporary requirements, like improving customer orientation and improving competitive position. Table 4 gives an overview of the goals of change processes.

TABLE 4 Overview of goals of change processes

Methods

Analysis

We first used cluster analysis to discover configurations of changing organizations in the data. Categorical principal component analysis (CATPCA) in SPSS was used to restrict the variables in the data set to a number of core variables that explained most of the variance in the data. CATPCA enabled us to identify a composition of context factors, organizational and change process characteristics, change strategies, and people in organizations, that could best differentiate between groups of organizations or change processes. Cluster analysis helps to discover coherent patterns in data and make them visible (Miller & Friesen, 1984). It is an explorative method, used to identify relatively homogeneous groups of cases based on the selected variables. Cluster analyses were carried out on the aspects of organizations, aspects of change processes and perception of change. The five configurations resulting from the cluster analyses

Results

In describing the results we focus on four issues: (1) configurations in changing organizations, (2) patterns in changing organizations, (3) differences in perspectives and (4) the between configurations, change strategies and organizational characteristics.

Configurations in changing organizations

We found five configurations in changing organizations. The five clusters are graphically displayed in Figure 1. The graphs represent organization members' opinions about the state of affairs in their organizations, about the change process and about their perception of change. Bars pointing to the left represent negative evaluations; bars pointing to the right represent positive evaluations. We labeled the five clusters as the innovative configuration, the skeptical configuration, the cynical configuration, the political configuration, and the configuration with an unclear change process.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Innovative configuration

In the innovative configuration, respondents have a positive perspective on both the state of affairs in the organization and the aspects of the change process (Figure 1). Almost 21% of respondents belong to this configuration. It is characterized by a clear organizational strategy and a smooth structure. Procedures and rules are not too strict, but not entirely absent either. Innovative organizations have a pleasant culture, are characterized by good relationships between employees and management, and political behavior is relatively absent. This positive context is reflected in the way in which change processes are managed. In the innovative configuration, change management pays much attention to the process of change. The change course is clear, changing does not evoke tensions, timing of changes is correct and organization members support the changes. Organization members have confidence in change management and a positive view of their line managers' roles. They have high outcome expectations and support for change is high.

Political configuration

In the political configuration, structure is characterized by rigid rules and regulations. Groups and individuals in the organization mainly pursue their own interests, exercise power, and changing evokes tensions among organization members. Of all respondents in the data set, 25% experience change processes as politically charged. Although organization members are moderately positive about aspects of the change process, they have a low outcome expectation. They are nevertheless prepared to contribute to the process. The idea here might be 'if you do not participate, you lose'.

Unclear change process configuration

In the unclear change process configuration, organizational characteristics are evaluated positively. Changes, on the other hand, are experienced as vague and not very transparent. We find 18% of all respondents in this configuration. Although organization members receive little information about changes, changing evokes few tensions among them and their expected outcome is relatively high. Changes, however, may not concern organization members very much, and as a result, they have no idea where and how they can contribute to the process.

Skeptical configuration

In the skeptical configuration, organization members have a negative perspective on both organization characteristics and the change process. Almost 23% of respondents have a skeptical perspective. Organization members are confronted with rigidity, rules, procedures and political behavior, and the exercise of power is not uncommon. The change goals are obscure. Changes evoke tensions between groups and individuals and are characterized by time pressure. Change management pays little attention to creating support for changes and organization members do not have much faith in change management and line managers. The result is a negative outcome expectation and low support for change.

Cynical configuration

In the cynical configuration, change management pays little attention to the process of change. Of all respondents, 13% have a cynical perspective. Both organizational characteristics and characteristics of the change process are perceived as barriers to a successful change process. The organization is characterized by obscurity, rigidity, a rule and procedure-based culture, political behavior and conflicting interests. Change evokes obscurity and tensions, and organization members feel time pressure. A lack of attention for creating support for the change process among employees is accompanied with a lack of faith in change managers and in the role of line managers. Rigidity in context and process seem to coincide: rigidity in the organization may be the primary reason for starting a change process but at the same time may obstruct change because of its influence on the choices made in the process. The result of a rigid context and an awkwardly handled change process is a low outcome expectation and a lack of support for change.

Change strategies

Contrasting perspectives of actors in change processes

The position of organization members and their role in the change process appear to coincide with their evaluation of the change strategy. Executive Board members, senior management, middle management, staff members, consultants and executive employees all have different perspectives on change strategy.

Insert Figure 3 about here

Executive Board Members

Executive Board members most frequently take the initiative to implement change and have an active managing role. In their opinion, they give ample attention to the views of organization members on the change process and to differences in perspective, and they consider change an interactive process. In their opinion, there is enough room for dialogue, for programmatic change and for negotiation involving everyone's interests. Board members think they give attention to everyone's ideas about change, and that everyone can ventilate their opinions and be involved in the process. The change process is always open to discussion and power strategies are applied sparingly. Executive Board members therefore seem to have a relatively self-satisfied perspective on changes.

Higher Management

Higher management also considers change an interactive process, although its perspective is more moderate than that of Executive Board members. Strikingly, members of higher management have a systematic concept of change, more so than Executive Board members. They believe changes are handled systematically, following a blueprint and fixed steps.

Middle Management

Members of middle management take a position between the Executive Board and higher management on the one hand, and employees on the other. Middle managers participate in change management more often than employees. So they can exert more influence on change, and have more opportunities to express their views on change. This influence is reflected in their perspective on change strategy: interactive strategies do play a role in the realization of change. On the other hand, their influence is limited and in spite of their influence, they also experience power strategies. This illustrates their awkward position: in the game of realizing departmental and individual interests and in allocating resources, their influence may be restricted to realizing the interests and changes in only their own department or team.

Staff Members

Staff members differ from Executive Board and management members because they experience power strategies more often. They find that interactive strategies are not used very often. Changes are imposed from above and cannot be influenced easily. Moreover, staff members experience change processes as being very systematic.

Employees and consultants

Employees and consultants have a rather critical view of change strategy. In their perspective, changes are realized from the top down with the application of power strategies with few or no opportunities for dialogue and programmatic change. Furthermore, changes are not carried out systematically. Consultants may criticize changes as being non-systematic because they themselves are more aimed at systematic change and therefore criticize change as an unsystematic, top-down process.

Work Council Members

Work Council members deviate the most in perspective from Executive Board and higher management members. They see changes as being managed from the top down from a power perspective with no opportunities for dialogue, negotiation or programmatic change strategies or attention for employees' perspectives and the change process. Work Council members take a position that is opposed to that of Executive Board members. Their views on change are indeed critical, but Work Council members are mainly positive about the organization in which they work, and as a result, they are very committed. Their position and critical involvement give them the power to offer incorrect decisions and procedures for debate. On the other hand, they may create even more distance between Executive Board members and themselves. They may therefore confirm Executive Board members' assumptions about organization members and change management.

Patterns in changing organizations

We used CATPCA to gain insight into patterns in changing organizations. In this article we have chosen to display only the combination of the first and second dimension from the CATPCA analyzes, because the third dimension appeared not to give explicit insight into the patterns we are interested in.

Insert Figure 2 about here

Change capacity

The first dimension in CATPCA is the dimension 'change capacity' (Figure 2). This dimension makes the largest contribution to the explained variance. Several characteristics of organizations, change processes and perception of change have strong loadings on this first dimension, as can be seen by the long arrows representing these variables, all pointing to the right. Also, expected outcome, and support for change have strong loadings on the first dimension. This means that positive evaluations of both characteristics of organizations, of change processes, and of perception of change coincide with a positively evaluated change capacity. The clarity and usefulness of goals and strategy, help provided by technology, culture and leadership, and work characteristics for example coincide with a high outcome expectation and support for change. In particular, the interactive change strategies dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation strategy coincided with a high change capacity.

Control orientation

The second dimension is the dimension 'control orientation'. Variables strongly coinciding with high control orientation are a rigid structure, realization of change in working parties, a great deal of political behavior and tensions as a result of change. Also, a large organization size and a large number of organization members experiencing the consequences of change in their jobs appear to coincide with a large degree of control. Additionally, sector and the function of the respondent coincide with the experienced degree of control orientation: control orientation is found more in governmental organizations and in staff members. We find it less in the profit sector and among younger staff members employed for shorter periods during the primary process. Lastly, a systematic change strategy appeared to coincide strongly with high control orientation.

Change strategy and change capacity

In our research we found some remarkable relationships between change strategy and change capacity (see Figure 2). Change strategy appears to coincide with the change capacity of organizations. When change managers choose interactive strategies such as dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation strategies, organization members are much more positive about the change capacity than when systematic and especially power strategies are chosen. Organization members find that interactive change approaches, such as dialogue, negotiation and programmatic change strategies, contribute to an organization's change capacity. A systematic approach contributes to some extent to an organization's change capacity, if and when combined with interactive strategies. When combined with a power strategy, a systematic approach does not contribute to an organization's change capacity. Change approaches characterized by a power strategy hinder the change capacity of organizations, according to organization members concerned.

Organizational characteristics and change strategy

In contrasting the change capacity and control orientation dimensions, we can see a relationship between organizational characteristics and change strategy. When organizational characteristics are evaluated as being clear, smooth and pleasant, interactive change strategies are chosen more often. When organizations are characterized by a procedural culture and tight legislation, the change strategy is characterized by a systematic approach and meddling of directive powers. Regulations, tight legislation, a procedural culture and interference of directive powers in the job go hand in hand with political behavior, interest-orientation, tensions, and a need for negotiation to reach consensus. In organizations where members have negative opinions concerning organizational characteristics, power strategies are experienced more often. Obscurity in policy and goals, an unpleasant culture and dissatisfaction about work and leadership go together with a lack of dialogue and ample use of power strategies. In large organizations, change processes appear to be more extensive. Change processes have more consequences for organization members' jobs and power strategies are used more often. In these organizations, the impact of change arouses negative experiences more frequently and change processes fail more often. Change processes are more often carried out by working parties and are managed systematically, in conformity with the tight, rule and procedure-driven structure. In small organizations with a smooth structure, change processes are more short-term and organization members experience them less frequently in their work. Here, interactive change strategies are chosen more often and power strategies are not frequently used. The relationships between organizational characteristics and change strategies suggest that both obstruct change processes and cannot be considered separately.

Organizational differences

In Figure 2 we can also see distinctions between organizations. Research and educational institutions and other large non-commercial organizations are characterized by a low reported change capacity and a moderate control orientation. Changes are frequently ordered by higher authorities and imposed from the top down. Obstacles to change can be identified in both organizational characteristics and in the process of changing. Outcome expectation is low and there is relatively little support for change. Financial service organizations are characterized by a limited change capacity and a high control orientation. Organizational and change process characteristics are evaluated as moderate. Small knowledge-intensive companies and industrial and food producing companies are characterized by high change capacity and a moderate to low control orientation. Organizational characteristics do not obstruct changes here, and also the change process is no obstacle to change. Outcome expectations are high; organization members support changes and are committed to realizing them. Relatively small organizations in the IT and service industry are characterized by little control orientation. Their organizational structure is smooth and political behavior is relatively absent. Change processes are relatively small-scale, are not characterized by a systematic approach and do not evoke tensions among organization members. Although outcome expectations are relatively high, lack of clarity about the ultimate purpose of the change process and a restricted exchange of information and ideas generate limited support for change: organization members expect a favorable outcome but are not involved in the process. They may not be expected to contribute, or they do not know how to contribute to the change process. Large bureaucratic organizations in public utility and government and large healthcare

institutions are characterized by a hierarchical structure, division of tasks, and a systematic change strategy. In these organizations, change is characterized by political behavior and tensions within and between groups and departments. Control orientation is high. The change process has consequences for many organization members. Changes are frequently ordered by higher authorities, imposed from the top down, and mainly carried out in a systematic manner. Changing evokes tensions among organization members and outcome expectations are low. The course of change, however, is clearer according to organization members, information about the goals and process is provided, and change management pays attention to creating commitment for the change process. Moreover, change management has more of a managing role as compared to other organizations.

Sector and size

Concluding, change capacity and strategy appear to be related to sector, but also to size. In large governmental organizations, such as central and regional governments, but also in public utility companies, financial service organizations and larger healthcare institutions, change processes are extensive in scope. They are handled systematically and are characterized by powerful steering by top management. Employees have a moderately positive view of the organization's change capacity. Power strategies are sometimes used, but there might also be some attention for dialogue, programmatic change and negotiation. Their change capacity is limited.

In (other) smaller organizations in the profit sector, people have more positive opinions about their organization's change capacity. There is more attention here for differences in perspective and change goals are more often externally oriented. Profit organizations are characterized by a positive change capacity while using interactive change strategies, combined with some systematic strategies.

Organization members also have more positive experiences with the impact of change; they have higher outcome expectations and support changes more than in organizations in the non-profit sector and governmental organizations. When change is however carried out in a non-systematic manner, organization members find their organization's change capacity to be limited.

In large non-profit organizations employing highly educated professionals, such as universities, research and non-commercial service organizations, power strategies are used relatively frequently to realize changes. This, however, results in obscurity surrounding the goals and management of change and in low change capacity. In large educational and research institutions and non-commercial service organizations change capacity is evaluated as being low. Here, according to organization members, there is little room for dialogue, negotiation and programmatic change, and frequent use of power strategies.

Configurations, change strategies and organizational characteristics

Combining the insights described above, each configuration appears to represent a specific combination of change strategy and organizational characteristics that can be found in specific sectors. This results in five patterns representing a unique combination of characteristics (Table 7).

TABLE: Five patterns of change capacity, change strategies, organizational characteristics and sector

Innovative configuration 21%	Political configuration 25%	Unclear change process configuration 18%	Skeptical configuration 23%	Cynical configuration 13%
Change capacity High change capacity: -Well-functioning organization -Change process handled well -High expected outcome -High estimated % chance of success	Change capacity Limited change capacity -Rigid organization, political behavior -Many tensions in change process -Moderate expectation of outcome -High estimated %	Change capacity Restricted change capacity: -Reasonably well-functioning organization -Unclear change process -Reasonable expected outcome -Reasonable estimation of % chance of success -Little support for change	Change capacity Low change capacity: -Badly functioning organization -Awkwardly handled change process -Low expected outcome -Moderate estimation of % chance of	Change capacity Very low change capacity: -Organization functioning under pressure -Badly handled change process -Very low expected outcome -Low estimated %

-High support for change	chance of success -Desire for influence and involvement in the process		success -No support for change	chance of success -Resistance to change
Change strategy Interactive strategy -Interactive strategy with high involvement of employees through dialogue and negotiation and a certain management of change through a systematic change approach	Change strategy Programmatic strategy -Systematic strategy with a certain involvement of employees and negotiation	Change strategy Negotiation strategy -Mainly negotiation strategy with unclear plan for the future and unclear management by top	Change strategy Systematic strategy combined with power strategy -Mainly systematic strategy with exertion of power by top management and little involvement of employees	Change strategy Power strategy -Mainly exertion of power by top management, little involvement of employees
Organization Adhocratic organizations -Moderate to low control orientation -Open for environment -Flexible structure -Small independent units -Autonomy in work -Small-scale changes	Organization Arena organizations: -Moderate to high control orientation -Under the influence of environment -Political behavior in rigid structure -Tensions between units -Striving for autonomy -Large-scale changes	Organization Service industry -Low control orientation -Open for environment -Flexible structure -Little political behavior -Autonomy in work -Small-scale changes	Organization Control oriented bureaucracy -High control orientation -Closed for environment -Rigid structure -Competition -Lack of autonomy -Large scale and lengthy change processes	Organization Professional bureaucracy -Moderate control orientation -Closed for environment -Flexible structure -Large organization consisting of small and independent units -Autonomy in work -Large scale change processes
Sector -Small organizations in knowledge-intensive service industry -Industrial and food producing industry	Sector -Medium-sized organizations in service and financial industry -Central government -Local government	Sector -IT -Service industry	Sector -Large organizations in financial services -Central government -Large executing governmental organizations -Large public utility organizations	Sector -Large organizations in healthcare services -Large-scale research and educational institutions

Conclusions

The limitations of entitative thinking

Results from this study illustrate that theoretical approaches explaining failure to change from one or more entitative perspectives on organizational characteristics and people in organizations are too simplistic explanations of a much more complex reality. By entitative explanations (cf. Hosking & Morley, 1991), we mean explanations that focus on inaccurate strategic goals, outdated technology, a rigid culture, incapable or change-resistant employees, insufficient information flow, an inflexible organizational structure or political behavior. Our findings give insight into the validity of these entitative explanations as barriers to change. They are too simple to really aid in understanding the complexity of change processes. It just is not possible to attribute barriers to change to one or a few organizational characteristics or aspects. Organizational characteristics, change strategy and change capacity do not appear to be independent entities but to form coherent patterns.

In addition, entitative perspectives on how change processes are managed, focusing on one or more aspects of change management, do not make sense. Characteristics of change approaches appear to be coherent. Also, organizational characteristics seem to cohere with change management. An organization's strategic course appears to cohere with change management. When organization members evaluate characteristics of their organization as clear, flexible and pleasant, this same

flexibility can be found in change management. Unclear policy and goals, an unpleasant culture, lack of autonomy, dissatisfaction with work and leadership cohere with lack of clarity in change processes, a lack of insight and commitment, interference by directive powers, dissatisfaction about change managers' and line managers' managing roles, low expected outcome and a lack of support for change. Regulations, strict legislation, a procedural culture and interference at the detail level of job realization go hand in hand with highly systematic change strategies, political behavior, a focus on self interests, tensions, and a necessity for negotiation to achieve consensus. Integral approaches that explain barriers to change with coherent organizational characteristics offer a perspective that is too limited to truly understand barriers to change. Furthermore, giving attention only to change management, like approaches aimed at organizational development, does not seem very useful. All of the organizations in our sample are engaged in serious change processes. In governmental organizations, changes often concern customer orientation, and in profit organizations, competitive position is, among others, an important reason to change. Although our results indeed suggest archetypical coherence and illustrate the difficulties in radical change (cf. Greenwood & Hinings, 1993), inertia among large organizations in the non-profit and governmental organizations appears to be related to change management and change strategy. A combination of different factors, like organizational and change process characteristics and change strategy, play an important role in the difficulties in changing experienced in these organizations and can therefore not be overlooked. Characteristics of organizations appear to form a context in which change managers make specific choices for specific and context bound change approaches which results in difficulties in changing, while these difficulties evoke certain choices for certain change approaches and creation of certain contexts and characteristics of organizations. Difficulties in changing, change context and management of change cannot be considered apart from each other. Our results illustrate that change context and management of change are coherent with expected outcome and support for change. Configuration membership therefore also seems to be a powerful predictor of performance differences across organizations (cf. Ketchen et.al, 1997).

Contrasting perspectives

There appears to be a relationship between organization members' position in the organization, the role they play in change processes, and change strategy. Change processes are frequently initiated and managed by organization members from higher in the hierarchy, such as Executive Board and members of higher management. They are often satisfied with their chosen change strategy and the change process and have high outcome expectations. They see change as being characterized by interaction, attention for different ideas, and input from middle managers and employees. Organization members with lower positions in the hierarchy, like staff members and executive employees, do not recognize this interactive approach that top managers claim to use. They experience change processes as imposed from the top down and are dissatisfied with how change is managed. They experience little allowance for personal input and see changes as realized with the exercise of power by senior management. Our findings suggest a discrepancy between members of higher management's espoused theories, the actions they claim to be taking, and their theories in use, or their real actions (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Besides, change apparently does not (fully) lie in senior management control, organization members do not passively accept changes but change processes are characterized by multiple meanings (Balogun & Johnson, 2004), and these multiple meanings are influenced by the chosen change approach. Change approach, as well as what change leads to, influences organization members' daily work, especially in political and skeptical organizations, and therefore influences organization members' attitude toward the change (cf. Lau & Woodman, 1995).

Choosing effective change strategies

The respondents in our study make clear that interactive and systematic change strategies, in combinations with different factors, contribute to the success of change processes. Interactive change strategies such as dialogue, negotiation strategy and programmatic change strategy appear to contribute to a positive expected outcome and support for change. Allowing for decentralized and differentiated realization of change, decentralized management by middle managers and employees, commitment of employees and middle managers through a mutual exchange of ideas and information, and contributions to change by employees and managers alike, cohere with a high expected outcome.

In addition, a positive evaluation of the current functioning of the organization and of the organizational climate contribute to a positive expected outcome and support for change. Externally oriented goals, an open attitude to the environment, a clear vision for the future and a shared desire to attain this future provide the impulse and the enthusiasm required for successful change.

Systematic change strategy

A clear change strategy implemented in a stepwise fashion, clear goals, a clearly planned process and careful timing of the steps in the process also contribute to the success of a change, if and when combined with interactive change strategies. Other factors that contribute to success are ensuring that process management is thorough, that middle managers are committed and that change managers are visible during the process. Lastly, negatively evaluated tensions and political behavior play a role in more than a third of all change processes. Discussing tensions between groups and individuals during change processes may help uncover and identify different perspectives and wishes and then deal with these differences.

These conclusions suggest that success in change processes appears to be directly related to the actions of change managers as influenced by different organizational characteristics such as culture and autonomy in work, and the scope of change. Particularly large-scale change processes seem to proceed with difficulty. Small-scale change processes, however, lead to more positive evaluations of change capacity. It serves the interests of change managers in large-scale change processes to choose an external orientation, a small-scale process, for a determination of objectives and concretization of objectives in a decentralized manner, and an interactive change strategy. Many large-scale change processes, however, proceed on a large-scale, are managed systematically and focus on characteristics of the internal organization. Apparently, these relatively static organizational characteristics form the basis for change, more so than events in the outside world. Another explanation might be that change managers assume they can handle external dynamics by internal reductions and reorganization. These goals reinforce the impression of entitative thinking among change managers, and the question that arises is, just how useful many of these change processes actually are.

Despite the possibilities offered by process approaches to change, our findings suggest that choosing other forms of action is not easy. In some of our configurations, a rigid structure and authoritative setting of objectives from the top predominate. The success of power and systematic strategies in the past might provide an explanation for an unaltered application of these strategies. Current threats can then lead management to revert to the old solutions (Beer, Eisenstat & Spector, 1990). A rigid structure, exercising influence and a self-interested orientation, however, do not seem by definition to result in a problematic change process. A rigid structure and political behavior appear to coincide frequently with a systematic approach to change processes. When a rigid structure and political behavior go together with a top-down change process, the perspective and support for change is negative. When systematic change management leaves room for dialogue, the perspective and support for change is more positive.

In our study, organization members are not prepared to support changes when organizational characteristics are evaluated negatively and the change process is managed awkwardly. Organization members also resist change when they are not involved in it themselves and when they are unclear about how they can contribute to an unclear process. Power strategies in particular result in resistance to change.

Discussion

Research is often used to try to simplify the complexity of reality and make it easier to cope with. Our configurations reflect the importance of considering change from multiple perspectives (Boonstra, 2004b). They however represent a typology that is not meant to reflect reality, but can be used to give meaning to reality (Weick & Quinn, 2004). These configurations serve as a guide which can be of value for professionals, and not as a model of reality but as a model on behalf of interpretation or the creation of a reality. To test our insights and facilitate interpretation, the configurations, labels and

interpretation were discussed in several learning groups of postgraduate students. These students claim to recognize the insights and contributed to their interpretation and to naming them. Our results, however, give rise to new problems and questions, for instance, about why certain change approaches often dominate in certain organizations. Our insights do not represent facts, but opinions and convictions about change processes. Although this might be considered a disadvantage, convictions offer valuable insights into the nature of social interactions. In our opinion, organization members make choices and act in change processes on the basis of assumptions and perspectives. Although our findings suggest a discrepancy between the thinking and acting of actors in change processes and offer captivating insights into perspectives and in differences in perspective, survey research cannot help us to understand these complex social processes completely and cannot make transparent how and why organization members in change processes choose particular actions. To understand the meaning behind the relationships and patterns, we need more knowledge of considerations and reasoning. Study into the reasons and motivations behind actions in change processes is therefore desirable. Research methods such as case studies can help ratify findings and can help us understand what is really going on in change processes.

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FIGURE 1
Five configurations

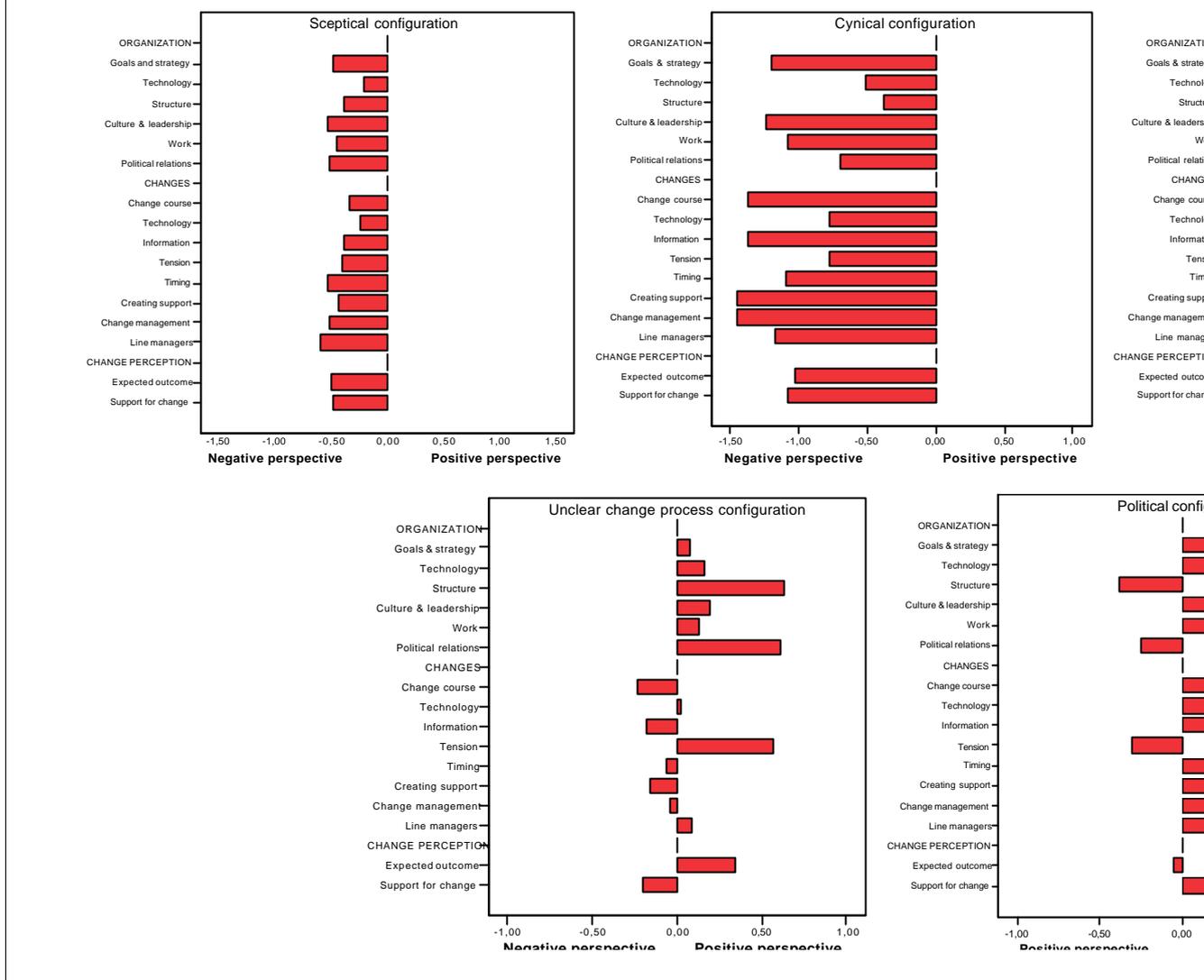


FIGURE 2
Results of CATPCA analysis; patterns in changing organizations

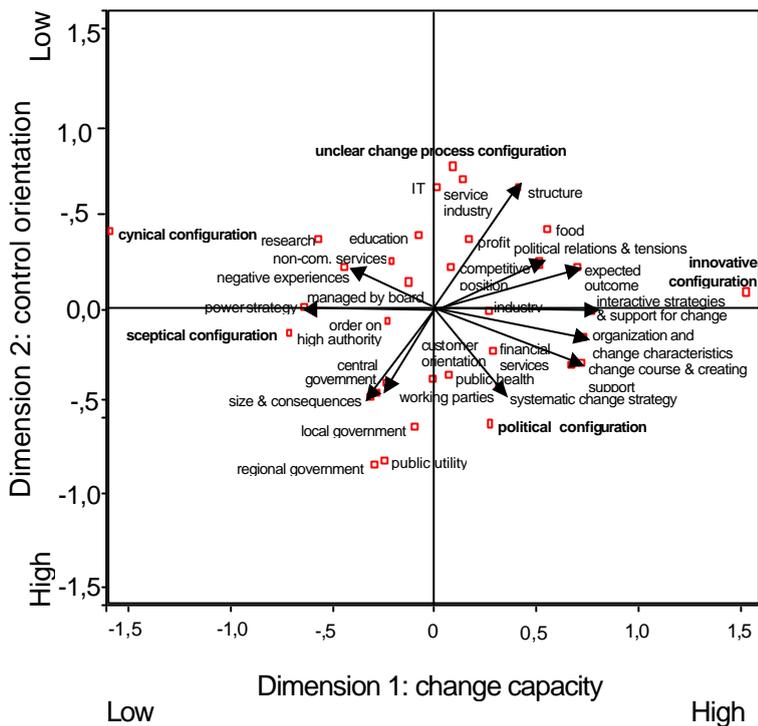
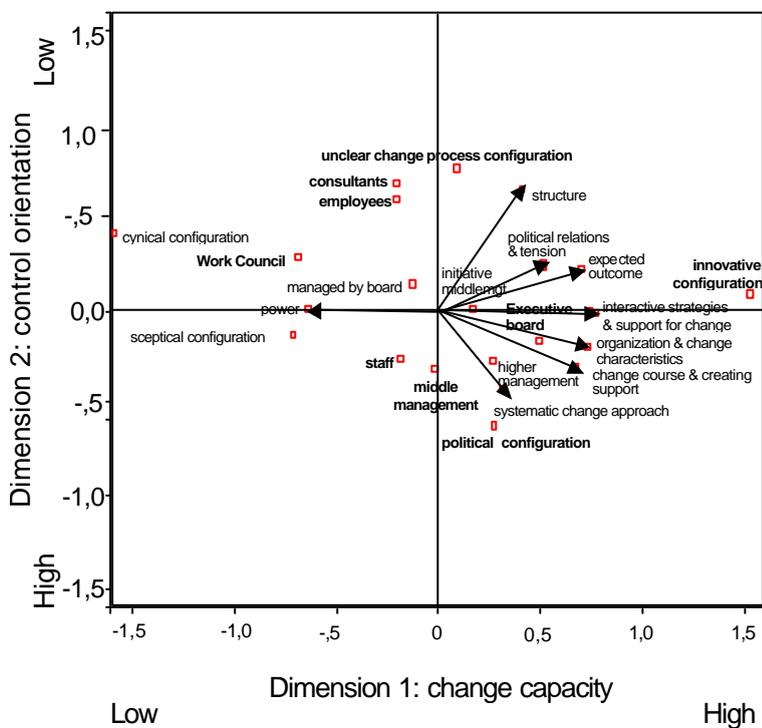


FIGURE 3
Results of CATPCA analysis; contrasting perspectives



Goal	Percentage
Improving customer orientation	55.5
Improving efficiency	53.7
Cost saving	38.4
Reinforcing competitive position	36.2
Business process redesign	34.0
Improving flexibility	30.2
Improving innovation capacity	27.9
Imposed from higher order	24.9
Restructuring	23.5
Fusion \ collaboration	19.8
New technology	12.1
Crisis	10.8
Privatization	9.9
Downsizing	5.7
Other	6.3