CHAPTER 4

Foundations of Organizational Change

In 1996, the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* hired a new editor, Cole Campbell, to address declining readership and increased competition. Among the changes instituted in the newsroom was a shift away from reporters being assigned to beats and toward journalistic reporting teams. The staff was generally enthusiastic and optimistic that this change would be a positive one that would increase the paper's quality, and they welcomed the team-based governance structure. The vision was that teams comprising members from the news and business divisions would collaborate on customer-focus and problem-solving initiatives to improve the paper. As the change was instituted, however, morale declined. Several mid-level editor and reporter positions were eliminated or restructured, and both reporters and editors had to reapply for jobs as team members or leaders in the new structure. Many staff members were frustrated that they were not consulted or involved in making the changes successful. Soon reporters began to dislike working in teams and declared that nothing had actually changed in the quality of the paper. Many award-winning and highly respected journalists left the paper voluntarily, citing the changes in the newsroom. In 2000, Campbell resigned. Circulation had declined from 320,000 to less than 295,000 during his 4-year tenure (Gade & Perry, 2003).

- What could have been done differently to make this change successful?
- What factors do you think contribute to making a successful change?

As you have no doubt experienced, achieving change is difficult. This story of organizational change at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* has likely been replicated at countless organizations. While it may be tempting to blame the leader and to dismiss failed attempts as yet another example of poorly managed change, it is beneficial to understand what happened in situations like this one and

what other explanations are possible. They can teach us about where attempts at change go wrong and how organizational change should be managed differently.

As we have discussed in previous chapters, organization development (OD) was primarily concerned early on with incremental changes that organizations could experience through interventions that targeted individual development. In recent years, with an emphasis on organizational effectiveness, OD has directed attention toward larger-scale and strategic change. Organizational change is the context (and purpose) of OD work, and a key competency of OD professionals is understanding the nature of organizational change, including what factors help to make changes succeed and what factors cause them to fail. In this chapter we will explore the nature of organizational change, including how researchers and practitioners think about change. We will explore the levels and characteristics of changes that organizations seek to make, and we will look at the research and writings of scholars and practitioners that develop theoretical models for how changes occur, as well as the fundamental issues that make changes successful.

To do that, we will also delve briefly into organizational theory. We will discuss two ways of looking at organizations: as systems and as they are socially constructed. The organization-as-system model has evolved from general systems theory over the past 50 to 60 years. Organizations-as-socially-constructed is a relatively more recent evolution of organizational theory, becoming prominent in the past 20 to 30 years. While these approaches are contradictory in some respects, containing some fundamentally different assumptions at their core, these ways of looking at organizations offer useful and different insights. They suggest approaches to organizational change that can help practitioners as they interpret how to best help a client achieve change in a particular organization. As you learn about these perspectives and models of organizational change in this chapter, keep in mind the practical challenges faced by those who lead organizational change and whether there is one perspective or approach that resonates more with you and your experiences.

You may be wondering why we need to delve into such theoretical detail just to understand how to manage organizational change at a practical level. The answer is that our approach to change depends on the underlying assumptions and beliefs that we have about how organizations work. In other words, "The way change facilitators think about causes of change determines how they contract, assess, intervene, and evaluate during their interactions with client organizations" (Olson & Eoyang, 2001, p. 7). As we have noted in previous chapters, it is important for OD practitioners to be conscious and intentional about the choices they make and to avoid adopting an intervention or model simply because it is fashionable. By learning more about the assumptions behind the models, you will be a more thoughtful and successful practitioner of organizational change.

Levels and Characteristics of Organizational Change

When we talk about organizational change, we are referring to many different kinds of changes that occur at many levels. Changes can occur at the individual level

when people learn new skills or develop new ways of working through mentoring, coaching, or education and training. Changes can occur at the group or team level as teams develop new ways of working with one another, define their goals and objectives, and learn ways of addressing conflict. Groups can also learn how to work more effectively with other groups (intergroup change) to solve problems or address interdependencies. Changes occur at the organizational level through the development of new strategies and processes, visions for a new desired future, and major system practices that affect all organizational members. Changes can also occur at suprasystem levels, where multiple organizations are implicated. These can involve changes, for example, between multiple organizations (such as mergers and acquisitions); between organizations and government agencies; or between cities, states, or nations.

Practitioners and scholars have noticed that organizational changes differ on a number of dimensions. Changes vary in several ways:

1. *Planning.* Organizational change can be planned or unplanned. Organizational members can be conscious and intentional about the changes that they want to make, often due to environmental factors, strategic or market needs, or other influences. Changes can also be unplanned, perhaps in response to an immediate threat or crisis. Weick (2000) contrasts planned changes with emergent changes, which are the "ongoing accommodations, adaptations, and alterations that produce fundamental change without a priori intentions to do so" (p. 237). Organization development as a field has primarily been concerned with the successful implementation of planned organizational change (Beckhard, 1969) or intentional change programs developed intentionally to improve the organization or address a deficiency.

2. *Magnitude.* OD literature differentiates between first-order and second-order change (Watzlawick, Weakland, & Fisch, 1974). First-order change consists of "incremental modifications that make sense within an established framework or method of operating," and second-order change is defined as transformational changes that "are modifications in the frameworks themselves" (Bartunek & Moch, 1987, p. 484). First-order changes tend to be alterations or changes to existing practices rather than a rethinking or reinvention of the practice. Implementation of a computer system that simply automates existing work practices is an example of first-order change, where existing work practices are modified within the existing understanding of how the work is done, maintaining its current purposes, objectives, and processes. First-order change reflects an evolution of existing definitions rather than a revolution or redefinition. Rethinking how the entire organization used the computer system, including redefining roles, processes, values, and implicit meanings, would be considered second-order change. Because second-order change tends to reflect a more substantial shift, some refer to this type of change as "organizational transformation" (Bartunek & Louis, 1988). Chapman (2002) writes that, historically, most OD models reflect concerns with first-order

change rather than second-order change. Others refer to differences in magnitude of organizational change by the labels *transactional* or *transformational* (Burke & Litwin, 1992), *evolutionary* or *revolutionary* (Burke, 2002), and *incremental* or *transformational* (Kindler, 1979).

3. *Continuity.* Weick and Quinn (1999) distinguish between episodic and continuous change. Episodic change is defined as distinct periods of change, usually infrequent and explicitly defined. When seen in this way, episodic change is usually framed as a response to a stable condition in which adverse conditions are present that force a change. Continuous change, on the other hand, reflects the idea that the organization is never truly out of a state of change, and that even in minute ways, change is always occurring.

Models of Organizational Change: Systems Theory and Social Construction Approaches

Scholars and practitioners have developed a number of models to explain how change occurs. Some of these models are based on years of empirical research, whereas others are based in practitioners' experiences of witnessing and implementing change in organizations. These models explain change differently based on different underlying theoretical assumptions about organizations, people, and work. In the first section, we will examine systems theory and models of organizations and organizational change that share systems theory's assumptions; in the second, we will discuss the social construction perspective and models of organizational change consistent with that approach.

Organizations as Systems

The first lens that we will use to look at an organization is as a system. Systems theory can be traced to an Austrian biologist, Ludwig von Bertlanffy, who wrote a series of books and articles beginning in the 1940s (see Bertlanffy, 1968) about the systemic interconnections of the natural world. Living organisms and the physical environment, Bertlanffy noted, displayed interconnectedness among their various parts. Fruit trees under stress due to weather conditions such as drought or extreme heat, for example, produce less fruit in order to conserve energy. General systems theory, according to Bertlanffy, was about understanding the characteristics of these natural systems and the underlying laws that defined their interconnections. Rather than investigate only the subparts of these organisms in isolation from one another, general systems theory tried to understand how the subparts related to one another.

Katz and Kahn (1966) were among the first to adapt this perspective to organizational theory. "All social systems, including organizations," they wrote, "consist of the patterned activities of a number of individuals" (p. 17). They argued that

open systems (natural and organizational) displayed common characteristics, such as the importation of energy or inputs, a throughput or transformation process, an output, feedback, homeostasis or equilibrium, and others. Systems theorists refer to these systems as "open" versus "closed" because the system is interconnected with its environment (Kast & Rosenzweig, 1972). Most theorists emphasize, however, that the natural system metaphor for organizations can be taken too far, since "social structures are essentially contrived systems" (Katz & Kahn, 1966, p. 33). See Figure 4.1 for a visual depiction of an organizational system.

To better understand these characteristics of a system, consider an automobile factory as an example. Inputs consist of raw materials such as the engine, doors, tires, and so on (or even more fundamental inputs such as sheet metal, plastic, or glass). The factory works with these raw materials through assembly, painting, and other construction processes. The output is a functioning automobile of a certain kind with certain characteristics. The cars are sold for money, which is used to purchase more raw materials, create new car designs, open more factories, and so on. Feedback processes (such as inventory numbers, sales rates, and sales revenue) create information that is fed back into the system to ensure that the system maintains equilibrium and that it can adapt appropriately to environmental conditions.

The system maintains equilibrium through market and consumer demands. For example, if cars are not being sold (for example, due to competition, economic conditions, or other environmental factors) and too much inventory exists, the factory will slow down production to adapt to these conditions. If demand is high, feedback to the factory will result in higher production rates (again adapting to what is demanded by the environment). When demand declines, without storage or conservation of resources (for example, retaining some money so that the organization can still function even when sales rates are lower than expected), the organization will cease to exist. Systems theorists call this property of systems "negative entropy," meaning the system needs to cope with expended energy without any incoming energy to assist the system in surviving. Moreover, all of these parts and functions are internally interdependent, so that changes in one part of the system will result in changes in other parts of the system (Nadler & Tushman, 1983).

Within these systems, certain functional specialized roles and procedures exist to aid the system in functioning properly. Production workers, for example, work
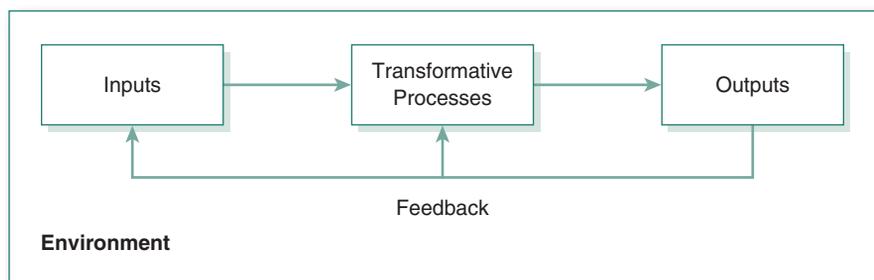

Figure 4.1 An Organization as a System

on a specific component of the assembly process. Managers and executives help the system's parts to function effectively and monitor the feedback from the internal and external environment. Procedures help the system to reproduce its processes in standardized ways. The overall organizational system also consists of a variety of interconnected subsystems that depend on one another. For example, the factory depends on human resources to hire and train employees properly. The entire system depends on finance to pay employees, to provide budgets used to purchase raw materials, and to collect money from customers. These departments exist as subsystems within the overall organizational system.

Open systems thinking is the process of considering how people, processes, structures, and policies all exist in an interconnected web of relationships. Systems thinkers see the whole of an organism or organization as larger than the sum of its parts, and as systems that exist within other systems of which they are a part (Burke, 2002). Mayhew (2006) writes that systems thinking is about analyzing the organization on three levels: events, patterns, and structure. Whereas *events* are single occurrences of an episode, *patterns* are the multiple and repetitive "archetypes" (Senge, 1990) that allow events to happen in the same way time after time. These patterns exist in *structures* that support and reinforce them. Systems thinking, as Senge (1990) describes it, consists of seeing the interrelationship of structures and components rather than simple and "linear cause-effect chains" (p. 71). Correcting organizational problems requires systems thinking rather than simple linear thinking (A caused B to happen) in order to solve the root of the problem rather than correcting the immediate, surface-level symptoms of the problem (asking questions such as "What caused A? Are there other causes?"). In other words, it requires analyzing structures and patterns rather than isolated events.

Systems theory has been a popular approach in organizational studies because it resonates with how we understand organizations to work at the most general level. Organizations produce something—whether it is a product, such as cars or breakfast cereal, or a service, such as financial consulting or providing Internet access. Changes in the environment, such as legislative or regulatory changes, cause organizations to adapt to new rules. Poor quality inputs lead to problems in transformation processes and result in poor quality outputs. Erroneous information in the feedback process creates unnecessary or problematic changes in the system. Aspects of the system are interdependent on one another, and problems in one part of the system create problems in other parts of the system. These statements about organizational systems provide a commonsense explanation for how organizations and their subsystems seem to us to work.

The Value of Systems Theory for OD Practitioners

For OD practitioners, systems theory offers a number of benefits. First, it can offer useful explanations for human behavior in organizations with attention to roles and structures rather than individual idiosyncrasies. Instead of seeing individual differences, OD practitioners can note where systems may encourage certain behavior patterns, usually subtly and without conscious decision. If a call center

regularly measures the number of calls completed per hour, then call-takers may be motivated to quickly complete calls at the expense of careful diagnosis and resolution of customer problems. Service managers may be motivated to dispatch replacement parts for customers via overnight mail (thereby inappropriately increasing expenses) in order to increase customer satisfaction (for which they will receive a bonus). The measurement and rewards system in both cases directs a certain behavior on the part of call-takers and service managers. Narrow job definitions and roles in one division may result in no employee taking responsibility for a certain problem as employees act in accordance with what the system has asked them to do in defining the role they occupy. Structured role definitions can explain how and why certain people interact with each other in patterned ways (for example, the emergency room nurse may take instructions from the attending physician). The systems theory perspective helps us see role-based interactional patterns rather than isolated actions of single individuals.

Second, understanding the system and its dynamics gives OD practitioners a more appropriate place to begin interventions for change, since the object of change is often best directed at the system level rather than the individual level (Burke, 2002). For example, inadequately maintained or broken equipment can reduce factory output levels. Instead of blaming the production manager's poor management skills for low factory production yields, or placing blame on factory workers for slow work, the systemic issue is a more direct cause. When an organization has unhappy customers due to a quality problem, instead of conducting training for customer service representatives on how to deal with angry customers, the quality problem should be addressed as the source of the problem. Katz and Kahn (1966) wrote that this attention on training was a common error in organizations—and little change results from it:

> It is common practice to pull foremen or officials out of their organizational roles and give them training in human relations. Then they return to their customary positions with the same role expectations from their subordinates, the same pressures from their superiors, and the same functions to perform as before their special training. (p. 390)

An organization that fires an unproductive employee and hires a highly paid, skilled replacement often discovers that the new employee is no more successful because the role exists in a structure (say, low budget, little decision-making authority) where virtually no employee could succeed. As Senge (1990) puts it, "When placed in the same system, people, however different, tend to produce similar results" (p. 42). OD practitioners can delve more deeply into the causes of problems and interconnections among groups, looking at systemic problems rather than at individuals or individual components of the system as the primary sources of error (M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999). This can lead to more fruitful targets for change.

Third, because changing one part of the system also results in changes to another part of the system, OD practitioners can be more deliberate about changes that are being proposed, and possible negative results can be predicted. If bonuses are given

to sales executives who sell a certain product, the factory likely will need to produce more of that product than others. If computer equipment is not replaced in order to reduce expenses, then additional expenses likely will be incurred in repairing equipment. If insurance claim application processing can be completed 2 days more quickly after a work process redesign, then the payment processing department that processes approved claims may have more work to complete more quickly than it can handle. Taking systemic issues into account may mean a more successful organizational change, as undesirable or "downstream" outcomes can be predicted and addressed before they become problems of their own. The organization as a whole can be internally consistent about the changes it wants to make.

Models of Organizational Change Consistent With a Systems Theory Approach

As might be expected given its popularity as a theoretical model for organizations, models of organizational change consistent with a systems theory approach predominate. What they may lack in specificity, they make up in helping the practitioner to see patterns and their relationships in a broader sense. We can thus see patterns in a large volume of data (in fact, we can use these models to analyze data, a point we will return to in a later chapter). They can help us see possible relationships that we may have missed, and they can help us see missing pieces that we might have expected to see but did not. Finally, they can help us see possible areas for change (Burke, 2002). The model may point out the influence of one area on another that may prompt us to note that we devote too much attention to the first topic and not enough to the latter. In short, models are like colored lenses that highlight some aspects of the terrain while they may obscure others, but in any case, they will help us see new things that we may not have seen before.

Four common models of organizational behavior and change consistent with a systems theory perspective are Lewin's three-phase model, the Nadler-Tushman congruence model, the Burke-Litwin model, and the Weisbord Six-Box Model. Each of these offers a different perspective on organizational analysis, highlighting a different approach to organizational change.

Lewin's Three-Phase Model of Change and Force Field Analysis

Kurt Lewin (1951) offered a three-phase model of organizational change in which he described change as a process of (1) unfreezing, (2) moving, and (3) refreezing. Current organizational practices need to be released (or unfrozen) to be changed. Once they are changed, they need to be refrozen as newly adopted regular practices. Lewin pointed out that two forces worked together to maintain equilibrium in an organization: forces promoting a change and forces promoting the status quo. Change can occur only when forces of change are greater than forces maintaining the status quo. This can happen in two ways: if forces promoting change are increased or forces maintaining the status quo are decreased.

For example, imagine that a company is going to introduce a new financial software system. Forces supporting the change might be that (1) the new system will permit a more sophisticated analysis of the company's financial results, (2) the new system will be more accurate than the current system, and (3) the system can be integrated into the current contracts and manufacturing systems. Forces resisting the change might be (1) the need for extensive employee training, (2) the cost of implementing the system, and (3) the reluctance on the part of employees who have had a bad experience with similar implementations. Lewin's model points out that change will not occur if the training, cost, and resistance are greater than the benefits that the system offers (see Figure 4.2).

Lewin's is an easily grasped description of change that has been widely adopted by managers and practitioners. It explains that to embrace something new, something else must be left behind. The organization must be freed from prior practices and must work to sustain the change when it is implemented. The model also reminds us that organizational members must be prepared for a change, and that levels of resistance can mean that the organization remains in a frozen state until we work to unfreeze it. Members must be practically or symbolically released from previous practices in order to change them, and following a change, conscious attention must be paid to reinforcing the change in order to help it stick. A popular adaptation of Lewin's model refers to an organization's current state, a transition state, and a desired state (Beckhard & Harris, 1977). Despite its popularity among practitioners, many scholars have noted that an "organization-as-ice-cube" model is, however, an oversimplification of a much more complex process, particularly since organizational practices are never exactly frozen (Kanter, Stein, & Jick, 1992).

Lewin's concept of force field analysis has become a useful tool for OD practitioners to use with clients. The tool can help organizational members understand what factors would support a given change effort and what resistance might prevent the change from being adopted. Some practitioners use the model as a formal assessment, asking team members (separately or in groups) to rate the strength of the forces for and against change on a scale from 1 to 5 to prioritize actions where energy should be directed (see Schwering, 2003, for a variation on this approach).
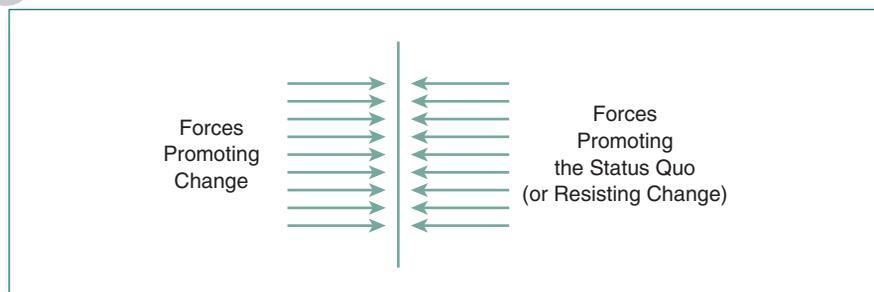


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Forces                              Forces
Promoting                         Promoting
Change                          the Status Quo
                              (or Resisting Change)
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Figure 4.2 Kurt Lewin's Force Field Analysis

The Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model

Noting that systems theory is "too abstract to be used for day-to-day organizational behavior-problem analysis" (Nadler & Tushman, 1983, p. 114), Nadler and Tushman have offered an expanded version of systems theory that contains additional concepts intended to be more useful to practitioners (see Figure 4.3). Nadler (1981) also explains that this model is particularly useful for organizational change. The premise behind the model is this:

> The model puts its greatest emphasis on the transformation process and in particular reflects the critical system property of interdependence. It views organizations as made up of components or parts which interact with each other. These components exist in states of relative balance, consistency, or "fit" with each other. The different parts of an organization can fit well together and thus function effectively, or fit poorly, thus leading to problems, dysfunctions, or performance below potential. Given the central nature of these "fits" among components in the model, we will talk about it as a *congruence model of organizational behavior,* since effectiveness is a function of the congruence among the various components. (Nadler & Tushman, 1983, p. 114)

Like the traditional model of systems theory described earlier, notice that inputs, transformation processes, outputs, and feedback are also included as part of the congruence model. Each of these has been expanded in this model. Inputs include environment, resources, and history, and are merged with organizational strategy to influence transformation processes. Market demands, human resources, technology, capital, information, and prior patterns all comprise the organization's inputs. Strategy is included in the congruence model as it determines what the organization will work on and how the organization must work to achieve its outputs. Outputs are now more specifically defined not only as the "tangible" product of the organization's processes, but outputs also consist of organizational, group, and individual performance. Nadler and Tushman include job satisfaction, stress, and other individual outputs as products of the work environment as well. Transformation processes have been expanded in the congruence model to include four important elements that relate to one another: task, individual, formal organizational arrangements, and informal organization. The task component encompasses the work to be done, but also the skills and knowledge required to do it and the degree of independence or judgment required. The individual component includes employees' knowledge and skills, engagement and motivation, preferences and attitudes, and other influences on individual behavior. Formal organizational arrangements include explicitly defined processes and organizational structures, job definition, metrics, the physical layout and environment, and other officially specified aspects of the work. Informal organization is defined as the less explicitly defined or tacit understandings, processes, methods, and norms that comprise how work is actually done.

Together, these four elements are defined as the primary components of the organization. They interact together in more or less consistent ways as the organization
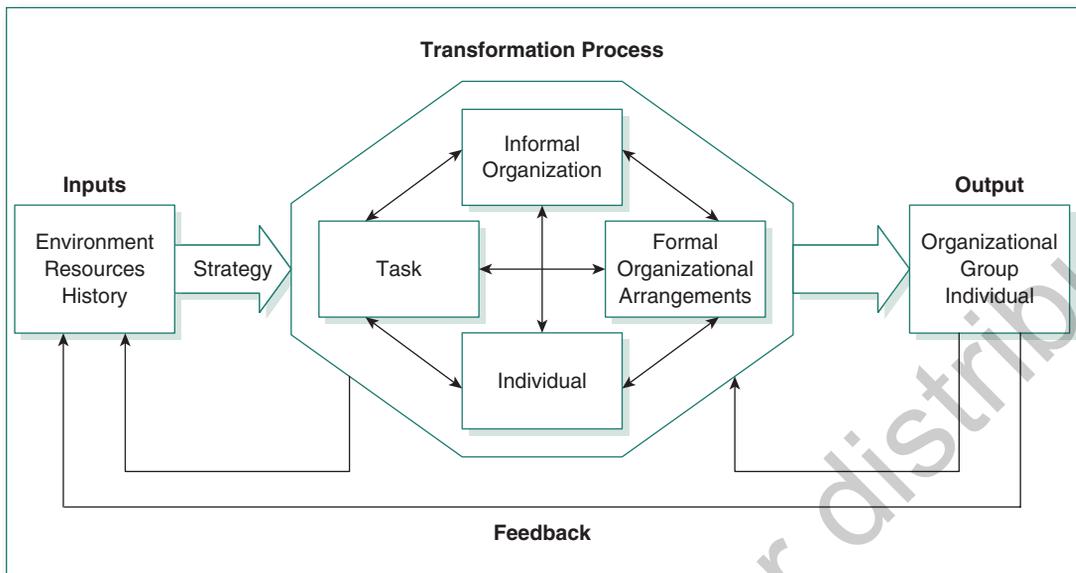
Figure 4.3 The Nadler-Tushman Congruence Model

produces its outputs. Nadler (1981) writes about a fundamental notion of the congruence model:

At the core of this systems-based perspective is the assumption that the interaction among the organizational components is perhaps more critical than the characteristics of the components themselves, and that as systems, organizations fundamentally work better when the pieces fit together. (p. 194)

Nadler and Tushman (1983) refer to this as the "congruence hypothesis," or the idea that the better the congruence between components, the more effective the organization. When an organization has a market demand to produce a new product (new input and new output), that demand requires a specific task to produce the output. If the task's demands require skills and knowledge that individuals do not possess, then there will be a congruence gap (or low "fit") between task and individuals. Organizational effectiveness can be achieved only if the fit is increased.

The model points to areas that affect one another so that changes in other parts of the system can be noted and controlled. Nadler (1981) explains that when parts of a system are changed, they may increase or decrease the "fit" or congruence with other parts of the system. When change happens, other components of the organization may resist the change and encourage regression to the prior state. Thus, Nadler points to the need to motivate change (the individual component), manage transitions, and pay attention to political dynamics of change as well.

The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change

Burke and Litwin (1992) praised many of the models of organizational change that had been developed up to the early 1990s, but they also saw them as overly simplistic. Many of these models had real-world proven utility and had been developed from practitioners' own experiences. Some prior models could not, however, predict the impact of an organizational change with certainty on other elements of the organization, and other models lacked empirical testing. Burke and Litwin developed their model of organizational performance and change as a causal model that could be empirically tested, that would specify the variables that would be affected by a given change, and that would take into account both first-order (transactional) and second-order (transformational) change (see Figure 4.4). Theirs is explicitly a model of organizational change based in systems theory that is intended to follow from its basic tenets.

Many observers have remarked on the complexity of this model and express confusion about the number and direction of the arrows. Burke and Litwin
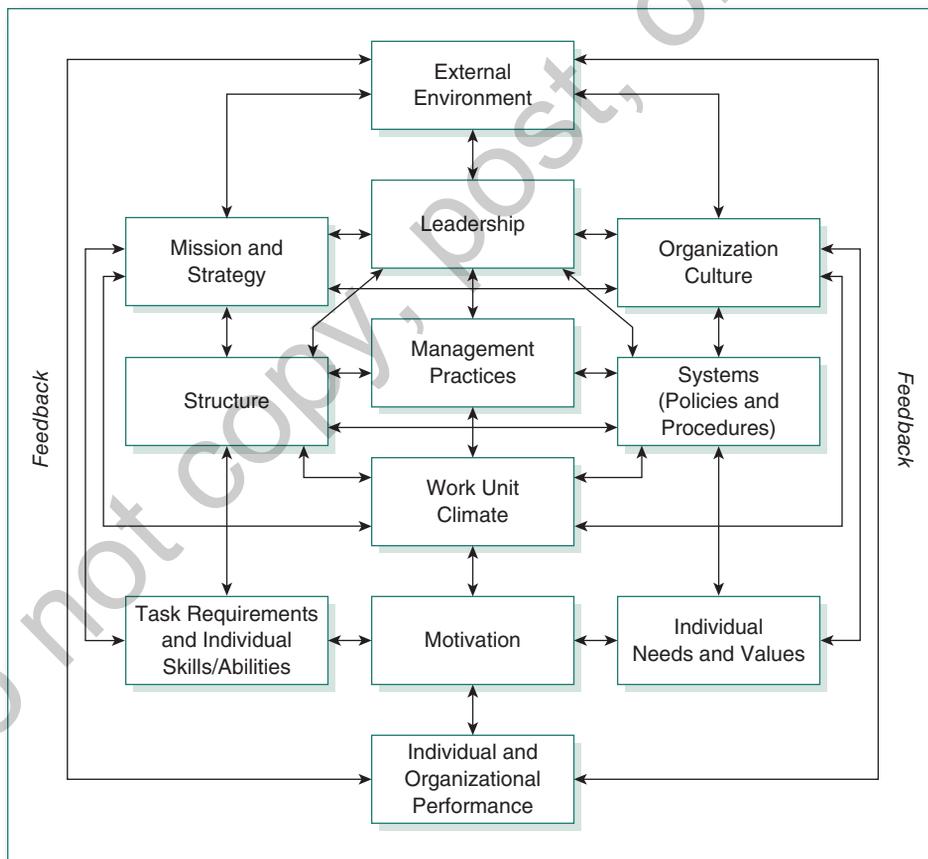

Figure 4.4 The Burke-Litwin Model of Organizational Performance and Change

SOURCE: Burke, W. W., & Litwin, G. H. (1992). A causal mode of organizational performance and change. *Journal of Management*, *18*, 523–545. Reprinted with permission from SAGE Publications, Inc.

acknowledge that the model is complex but state that change is such a complex phenomenon, the model is still likely a simplified version of what actually occurs during change. Similar to systems theory, the external environment at the top of the model represents inputs, the individual and organizational performance box at the bottom of the model represents the output, and all other boxes between these represent the throughput processes. Arrows indicate the greatest directions of influence among the variables, but the downward arrows, they believe, have greater influence on lower boxes than do the upward arrows to the variables above them. Burke and Litwin write that all boxes generally affect all others, but the arrows in the model represent the most important causal links. They define each component as follows:

- *External environment.* Any outside condition or situation that influences the performance of the organization
- *Mission and strategy.* What employees believe is the central purpose of the organization and how the organization intends to achieve that purpose over an extended period of time
- *Leadership.* Executive behavior that provides direction and encourages others to take needed action
- *Culture.* "The way we do things around here"; culture is the collection of overt and covert rules, values, and principles that guide organizational behavior and that have been strongly influenced by history, custom, and practice
- *Structure.* The arrangement of functions and people into specific areas and levels of responsibility, decision-making authority, and relationships
- *Management practices.* What managers do in the normal course of events to use the human and material resources at their disposal to carry out the organization's strategy
- *Systems.* Standardized policies and mechanisms that are designed to facilitate work
- *Climate.* The collective current impressions, expectations, and feelings of the members of local work units
- *Task requirements and individual skills/abilities.* The behavior required for task effectiveness, including specific skills and knowledge required for people to accomplish the work assigned and for which they feel directly responsible
- *Individual needs and values.* The specific psychological factors that provide desire and worth for individual actions or thoughts
- *Motivation.* Aroused behavioral tendencies to move toward goals, take needed action, and persist until satisfaction is attained
- *Individual and organizational performance.* The outcomes or results, with indicators of effort and achievement; such indicators might include productivity, customer or staff satisfaction, profit, and service quality (Burke, 1993, pp. 130–132)

Burke and Litwin write that the model attempts to integrate notions of transformational and transactional change. The factors most influential in transformational change are due to environmental causes, so the top four boxes (external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, and organization culture) have the greatest

influence on performance. During transactional change, the other boxes below this level (structure, management practices, and so on) are the major factors of interest. Burke (2002) has described several cases in which applications of the model have been successfully tested.

Weisbord's Six-Box Model

Strictly speaking, Weisbord's Six-Box Model, first elaborated in a 1976 article, was not explicitly articulated as a model of organizational change (see Figure 4.5). In later years, however, Weisbord's model has become a popular diagnostic model to illustrate elements of a system that are out of sync with other parts of the system, in particular to explore how formal and informal systems are often misaligned or
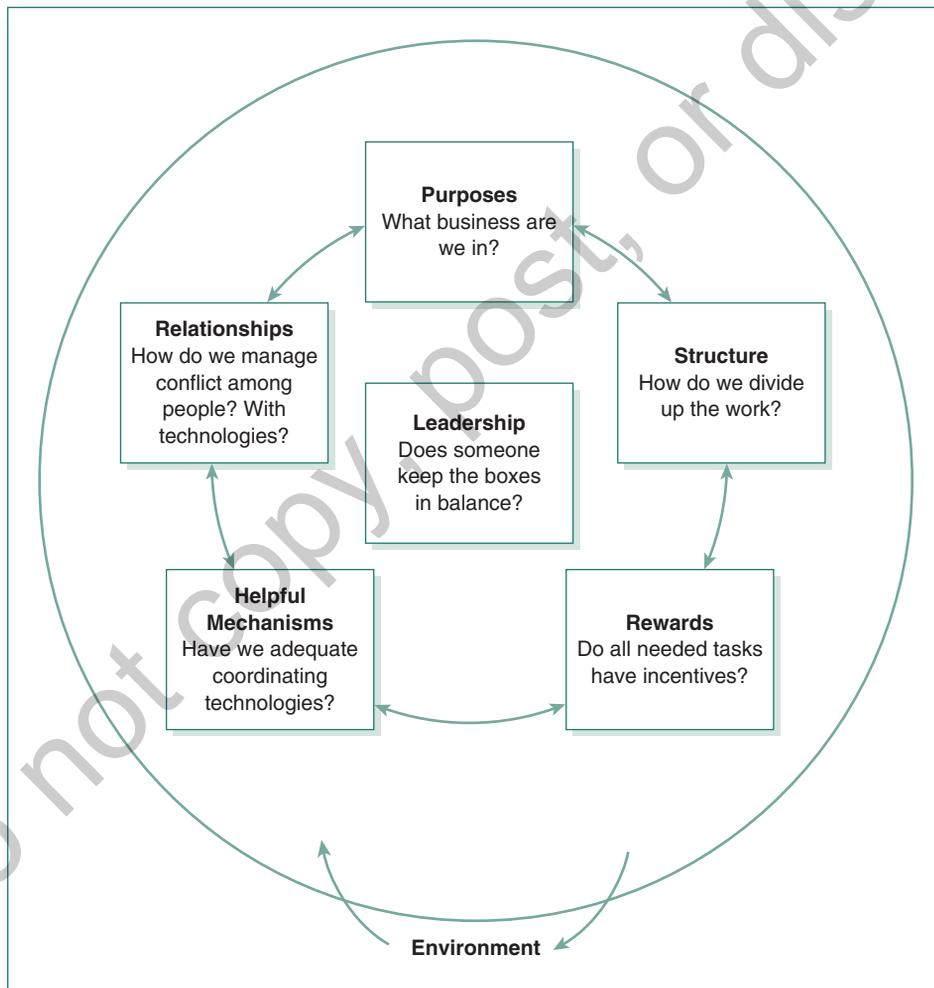

Figure 4.5   Weisbord's Six-Box Model

SOURCE: Weisbord, M. R. (1976). Organizational diagnosis: Six places to look for trouble with or without a theory. *Group & Organization Studies, 1,* 430–447. Reprinted with permission.

contradictory. Consequently, it has become a popular model among practitioners for analyzing and conducting organizational change (Birnbaum, 1984; M. W. Ford & Evans, 2001).

Weisbord refers to the model as a "radar screen" (Weisbord, 1976, p. 431) depicting the interrelationships among six of an organization's component parts. Based on his experience, the model categorizes six common problem areas in an organization and helps to illustrate how symptoms can be seen in a systemic light. Each of the boxes has both formal (espoused and official) and informal (how things work in practice) components, and a complete diagnosis must attend to both. The model's six boxes are as follows:

- *Purposes.* This box includes formal goal clarity (how well the goals are explained) and informal goal agreement (how well the goals are truly understood and acted upon).
- *Structure.* How well does the organizational structure match the needed outputs? Is the organizational structure followed or undermined in daily practice?
- *Rewards.* Does a (formal) reward system exist, and does it actually produce results, making employees feel as if their contributions are being rewarded (informal)?
- *Relationships.* This concerns the degree to which people can work interdependently and manage conflict successfully.
- *Helpful mechanisms.* What formal mechanisms exist to facilitate work, such as budget processes, meetings, reviews, or other communications? How well do these helpful mechanisms meet their objectives?
- *Leadership.* How do leaders lead? What do they state as their formal expectations? What norms do leaders informally role model or informally communicate?

When formal and informal components of the boxes are not in alignment, the organization may be expending energy maintaining both a formal system and an informal one that may or may not be functioning as needed. It is not the case that one of these systems is better than the other, but understanding how these six boxes function formally and informally can give insight into why an organization may be experiencing problems and where to begin interventions for change (Weisbord, 1976). Additional gaps may exist between the organization and its environment, between individual work and the organization's goals, or between different organizational units. It is this formal and informal gap analysis that Weisbord and others have noted is an especially important aspect of the model. Weisbord's Six-Box Model thus gives great insight into the internal functioning of a system. As some have noted, this advantage of the Six-Box Model may be its drawback as well, as it attends less to elements of the external environment and issues such as scarce resources or demands of external stakeholders (M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999). It also gives less insight into which gaps may be more serious than others. By placing leadership in the center of the model, it may also overemphasize the role of leadership and understate the role of individual employees in the functioning of the organization.

This model, like the other three models, is consistent with the approach suggested by systems theory, that an organization exists in interaction with its environment, and that managing problems, misalignments, and holes between various components is a key to successful organizational functioning. This has been the dominant approach in OD and organization theory (Shaw, 1997). Assumptions about organizational components and analysis of "fit" remain a key feature of diagnostic recommendations in the practitioner literature (e.g., M. I. Harrison & Shirom, 1999). This approach can be enhanced, however, by another perspective, to which we now turn.

Organizations as Socially Constructed

The story goes that three umpires disagreed about the task of calling balls and strikes. The first one said, "I calls them as they is." The second one said, "I calls them as I sees them." The third and cleverest umpire said, "They ain't nothin' till I calls them."

—Simons (1976; cited in Weick, 1979, p. 1)

A second view of organizations is a more recent evolution in organizational theory, and it offers a different perspective on change than the models we have just seen. The intellectual history of the idea of social construction in organizational studies is usually traced to Berger and Luckmann's (1967) seminal work *The Social Construction of Reality,* and it has been particularly influential in organizational theory over the past 3 decades. Consider that in our everyday language, or even in texts such as this one, organizations are frequently personified as actors in their own right. We speak of working "in" an organization, thinking of an organization as a container or physical environment. We speak of organizations "adapting" to their environment, or the production department "deciding" to increase output. Classical organizational theory actually considered organizations to be "living things" with "a concrete social environment, a formal structure, recognized goals, and a variety of needs" (Wolf, 1958, p. 14). Yet organizations are not people, and a number of important ideas are obscured when we personify them.

The social construction view argues that organizations are not exactly things at all, but that the organization is really a concept developed out of our own actions and language. Some scholars suggest that the study of organizations is really the study of the process of organizing, with the verb form emphasizing the active role we take in creating our organizations. If you consider an organization that you know well and try to point to what "it" is, you may point to a building to show where it is located or show an organizational chart as an abstract representation of how that organization is structured, but you will not have pointed to the organization. (The building could still exist without the organization, for example.) Drawing boundaries between the organization and its environment can be an equally challenging exercise. Consider the city in which you live as an organization and try to delineate what is "inside" and what is "outside" it. There is city hall and its employees,

but what about the citizens, or those who do business in the city but live in another, or the developers who built the local shopping mall? Are they to be considered part of the organization as well, or do they belong in the environment category? From this perspective, the boundary between the organization and its environment is not a sharp or easily defined one, and can even sometimes be fluid from interaction to interaction. Weick (1995) writes that "*environment* and *organization* conceal the fact that organizing is about flows, change, and process" (p. 187). The terms *organization, boundary,* and *environment* in systems theory become more complex and perhaps less meaningful when we start to delve more deeply into how to define them.

The view of organizations as socially constructed differs sharply from the systems theory perspective in many respects. It challenges the prevailing assumptions of systems theory that organizational environments, inputs, processes, outputs, feedback, and so on are self-evident concepts and categories with predefined singular meanings on which we all agree. Instead, it sees those concepts and categories as created, developed, and infused with meaning by organizational members. The quote above about baseball umpires illustrates the primary difference between systems theory and social construction. In systems theory, the process of pitching to a batter, calling balls and strikes, and tallying outs and so forth would describe a subprocess in a baseball game. While accurate on its surface, it omits the process of constructing meaning (defining what count as balls, strikes, and outs) from an umpire's perspective that actually creates the possibility of the game existing (imagine if all umpires agreed to refuse to interpret a pitch!).

As a second example, let's return to the illustration cited previously about the automobile factory and feedback processes, where information such as sales revenue figures fed back into the factory tells them to build more cars. The revenue figures themselves, as numbers, mean nothing on their own. Instead, they must gain meaning through the process of interpretation. An organizational member (a manager or executive, presumably) must interpret the sales figures and decide (based upon a preexisting agreement, past experience, or even just a hunch) that the numbers mean that enough cars have been sold that additional inventory will be needed. Here, it is the manager's interpretation and judgment that give the data meaning for the organization. Indeed, an incredible amount of information exists in organizational environments that must be given meaning (think, for example, of the competitive landscape, Wall Street expectations, financial performance, past history of the firm, union agreements and employment conditions, customer expectations, and much, much more). To say, as systems theory does, that the environment specifies how the organization must act to achieve equilibrium omits the process of making and creating meaning, and developing and sharing interpretations, that explains how and why organizational members decide to take action. (Notice how few organizational members are mentioned in the descriptions of systems theory.) One could never gather all relevant information before a decision. Instead, information is selectively gathered, made sense of, and shared to create a socially constructed truth that organizational members will use for decisions and action (March, 1994). The category of "environment" is thus invented

and invested with meaning by organizational members, and it does not exist outside of their interpretation. Weick (1995) calls this concept *sensemaking,* which he defines as "placement of items into frameworks, comprehending, redressing surprise, constructing meaning, interacting in pursuit of mutual understanding, and patterning" (p. 6).

Interactions and language are important areas of attention in the social construction perspective because it is through regular interaction and dialogue that organizations are developed and change can occur. As J. Kenneth Benson (1977) wrote, "People are continually constructing the social world. Through their interactions with each other social patterns are gradually built and eventually a set of institutional arrangements is established. Through continued interactions the arrangements previously constructed are gradually modified or replaced" (p. 3). Thus, sensemaking is an ongoing process, not something with a defined beginning or ending (Weick, 1995). (This idea reinforces the value of OD, discussed in the previous chapter, that organizations and individuals are always in process.)

The social construction perspective has become an attractive one for both researchers and practitioners because it resonates with what we experience in organizations as we make sense of our activities and the actions of others. It also respects the ambiguity and multiple meanings that many organizational members experience and the necessary interpretive processes that characterize much of organizational life. Decisions are considered and rationalized based on complex and contradictory facts. Roles are negotiated and enacted, not predetermined by job descriptions. Press releases and executive communications are scrutinized, debated, and examined for hidden meanings. We leave conversations with colleagues to begin other conversations, sharing information and interpretations in each conversation. Multiple contexts and facts can be brought to bear on any situation to result in ambiguous and inconsistent interpretations. For many students of organizational studies, the social construction perspective fills in the missing elements of systems theory to provide a richer and more dynamic view of how organizations work. It describes how members experience organizations as social environments where interaction is fundamentally how work is accomplished and sensemaking is how it is understood and experienced. Particularly in less mechanistic, manufacturing-oriented environments, in today's knowledge-intensive organizations, the machine view of organizations assumed by systems theory seems less accurate when applied to the globalized and fragmented "postmodern" organization of the 21st century. Many believe that the social construction approach more effectively captures this new reality (Bergquist, 1993).

The Value of the Social Construction Approach for OD Practitioners

The social construction perspective has gained a following among organization development practitioners because it offers several distinct benefits. First, like systems theory it offers a useful (but different) explanation for human behavior.

It explains why, for example, organizational members would be less willing to take risks after witnessing a layoff in another division in which risk taking was common. Perhaps a logic has been developed in which members believe that taking risks means that losing one's job is likely. As a second example, consider that perhaps an executive decides to terminate a product line that is losing money. Instead of seeing this as a one-dimensional decision based on input from the environment, the social construction perspective helps to articulate the complexities in collecting, interpreting, and sharing the information used to make and communicate the decision. The social construction perspective directs the OD practitioner's attention to the cultural processes of sensemaking that result in action.

Second, the social construction perspective emphasizes the active role that members take in creating the organization. Members may decide to create a new department, change a structure, adopt new titles, or change a process. While an individual member may not have the choice to change a certain policy, the policy is one developed by organizational members and created for the organization's benefit. Relationships among supervisors and employees are not confined to rigid role-based interactions, but are multidimensional and can be friendly, cold, formal, sociable, and so on. Relationships between coworkers or departments are more complex than simply sharing orders or instructions between them and can be cooperative or contentious, relaxed or rigid. The social construction perspective illustrates the active choice that we make in creating these systems and relationships. This implies that OD practitioners should create situations in which people can choose a different organization to create, such as new policies, processes, roles, or relationships. Accepting this adaptability gives practitioners and organizational members the freedom to create changes that they desire to see (within boundaries, frequently, that we also agree to respect). While this does not deny the importance of leadership in change or the financial or environmental realities, it places an equal emphasis on everyday conversations that occur in the organizational network among all participants.

Third, the social construction perspective helps OD practitioners to see the importance of communication in creating change (J. D. Ford & Ford, 1995):

> Stories, myths, rituals, and language use are not simply reflections of organizational meanings; they are the ongoing dynamics that constitute organizational life. Meanings, then, do not reside in messages, channels, or perceptual filters. Rather, they evolve from interaction processes and the ways that individuals make sense of their talk. (Putnam, 1983, p. 40)

Words and their context are important, and the interpretive processes that we use to make sense of words often go unexplored. Consider a situation in which an organization, under financial pressure and rumors of layoffs, is required by law to send out an annual benefits notice to all employees. The notice states that following an involuntary termination, employees are eligible for continued medical benefits for a length of time following termination. From the perspective of the human resources benefits department, this is an ordinary compliance activity, but from an

employee's perspective, it could be alarming to receive such a notice unexpectedly mailed to one's home, considering the context. OD practitioners can become attuned to context, language, and interpretation mechanisms and help organizational members become more explicit about their interpretations. They can understand the context for interpretation of any particular message and make better recommendations about how communication will be received. Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (1995) write that communication is not just another part of change, but it is the primary means by which change occurs.

Finally, the social construction perspective stresses that organizational change has as its foundation a change in meaning. Sensemaking logics lie beneath values, beliefs, and attitudes, as well as organizational practices, identities, and processes. Simply changing a practice, a role, a title, or a department name does not always change the underlying interpretive processes that members have adopted. Consequently, the approach assumes that change can best be accomplished when organizational members have the opportunity to work together to define new practices (Weick, 1995).

Approaches to Organizational Change Consistent With a Social Construction Perspective

Approaches to organizational change consistent with a social construction perspective look quite different from those explained earlier that are consistent with a systems theory perspective, as they recognize that change is a "messy" and unpredictable phenomenon (Shaw, 1997). Calling these approaches "models," in the sense that we have just seen, is also misleading because they question the very structures that systems theory assumes. Instead of locating organizational change in categories such as leadership, strategy, or rewards, the social construction perspective explains change as a change in interpretive mechanisms, conversations, communication, meaning, and cognitive schema. "This, in turn, implies that a primary way to effect change in social systems is by changing the prevailing discourse," write Marshak and Grant (2008, p. 39).

In fact, the very idea of organizational change is rethought in this perspective. Weick (2000) argues that "the breathless rhetoric of planned transformational change, complete with talk of revolution, discontinuity, and upheaval, presents a distorted view of how successful change works" (p. 223). He argues that most models contrast change with inertia, whereas if we recognize that organizations are never really in inert states at all, we become more interested in the ongoing "ebb and flow" (p. 230) of organizational life. As Jeffrey Ford (1999) points out, what constitutes a change is ambiguous and can mean different things to different people. Most change models tend to presume that a change is a single, easily identifiable phenomenon that members could point to and identify as "the change." Most practitioners and organizational members, however, recognize that change has multiple parts, some of which may or may not be successful, and that these have multiple meanings for various audiences. A widespread organizational change affects different employee groups in different ways, so a single definition

of the change may not be possible. Instead, as we have learned, the social construction approach is interested in what the change means to people, recognizing that this meaning may shift and adapt at various points in time. Consequently, social construction approaches to change tend to emphasize continuous change rather than episodic change, privileging the role of language and discourse in change (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Jeffrey Ford (1999), for example, argued for a definition of organizational change as "shifting conversations," in which people use different language to understand and accomplish change. When change occurs, it does so "when one way of talking replaces another way of talking" (Barrett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995, p. 370). Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (1995) describe four different kinds of conversations that occur during organizational change: conversations that initiate change, conversations that seek to understand change, conversations for performance, and conversations for closure. No one mix of conversational types is right for every change, they note:

> The successful implementation of change is a function of conversations that reflect the evolving context and progress of the change, including the results produced and breakdowns to be resolved. Identifying an appropriate conversational pattern, therefore, is a pragmatic issue of determining which type of conversation is most likely to work in the current situation, trying it, seeing what happens, and making adjustments in and to subsequent conversations. What this means is that change managers may find a conversational mix that is effective in one change but ineffective in another. (J. D. Ford & L. W. Ford, 2008, p. 448)

This approach can explain how, when change does not proceed as expected, certain conversations may not have taken place at all, or may have taken place unsuccessfully.

This model of change-as-communication calls into question the categories discussed in earlier models (e.g., structure, systems, leadership, culture), because those factors are only relevant to the extent that organizational members draw upon them in conversation. Understanding how a change is proceeding depends on careful study and attentive listening to how language has changed (Anderson, 2005b). Echoing MacGregor's recommendation to listen carefully to managers' implicit theories, Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (1995) write, "Managers' assumptions about how ideas are related can be discovered through a study of their conversations about change, particularly during conversations for understanding" (p. 563). Thus, this approach sees change not as an abstract set of influences among boxes, but as a series of conversations where change can be discussed and debated, and new ideas can emerge.

Also proposing a social construction model for change in their popular work *How the Way We Talk Can Change the Way We Work,* Kegan and Lahey (2001) have written about seven new language shifts that leaders can encourage to support change:

1. From the language of complaint to the language of commitment

2. From the language of blame to the language of personal responsibility

3. From the language of "New Year's Resolutions" to the language of competing commitments

4. From the language of big assumptions that hold us to the language of assumptions that we hold

5. From the language of prizes and praising to the language of ongoing regard

6. From the language of rules and policies to the language of public agreement

7. From the language of constructive criticism to the language of deconstructive criticism (pp. 8–9)

They argue that these seven languages play a role in conversations that we have at individual, team, and organizational levels, and that they often inhibit us from making the changes we seek to make. New conversations can encourage greater learning and achieve change.

The role of the change agent implied by social construction models of change is to facilitate an appropriate environment for these conversations. Managing change in this vein is more like coaching an improvisational jazz band than turning a series of levers and dials on a machine. Creating change does not mean rigidly following the same set of rules through a well-defined process no matter what is trying to be changed, but being inventive and creative with how it is achieved, negotiating among different stakeholders to produce the dialogues that need to happen for change to succeed. In this approach, "the job of a change agent . . . is to initiate, maintain, and complete conversations so as to bring into existence a new conversational reality in which new opportunities for action are created and effective action takes place" (J. D. Ford, 1999, p. 492). How effective change is depends on how well new conversations are initiated and adopted. Marshak and Grant (2011) argue that multiple levels of conversation exist at which to intervene to accomplish change: the intrapersonal (cognitive frames and schema), the personal (one's own language choices), the interpersonal and the small group (conversations occurring between individuals or in groups), and the organizational level (official discourses and statements of mission and values). Each of these conversations is in some way implicated in effective change.

Jeffrey and Laurie Ford (2008) have developed a practical tool called the conversational profile for change managers to use in analyzing and interpreting the four kinds of change conversations described earlier. They invite managers to log their conversations during a period of 2 weeks or so. Managers write, as in a journal, who participated in the conversation and what was said, as close to a verbatim record of the conversation as they can recollect. Managers then identify which types of change conversations they have engaged in most frequently, and they can then alter their approach if the results of those conversations have not resulted in the outcome they expected or desired.

> After seeing analysis of their conversations and results, managers come to their own conclusions about what might be missing or not working; that is, develop a hypothesis, which they can then test by altering either the type of conversations they use or the content of those conversations. (p. 455)

Managers might realize, for example, that they engage in conversations for understanding, assuming that action will follow, but that they have not been explicitly engaging in conversations for performance in which actions are discussed.

New Paradigms in OD

In addition, related to the social construction approach to change, new paradigms are emerging in organization development that take the social construction philosophy quite seriously. One of these has been influenced by the study of self-organizing systems in biology and other disciplines. The complex adaptive systems perspective, like the social construction approach reviewed above, rejects the notion of the organization as a machinelike set of interconnected and systematized parts that form a predictable whole. Instead, this view sees the organization as ever-changing based on emerging patterns of self-organization created by the interactions of those agents acting as part of it (Olson & Eoyang, 2001). This approach rejects the belief inherent in systems theory that systems are generally alike and general principles can be applied to predict how they will react and respond. Instead, complex adaptive systems thinking believes that individuals and organizations respond differently depending on the circumstances, so behavior cannot be predicted and controlled so systematically. This implies that managing change does not work from a top-down perspective, as in systems theory, but instead, "the role of the change agent is to use an understanding of the evolving patterns to . . . affect the self-organizing path, to observe how the system responds, and to design the next intervention" (Olson & Eoyang, 2001, p. 16). For many observers, this approach resonates because it highlights how changes can adapt and spread throughout a system to illustrate how even small changes made to a single project team can have expansive effects across the organization.

Another of these emerging paradigms, a dialogic approach to OD, similarly supports the notion that changes in an organization can be continuous and emergent, and that they are based in the narratives and changing conversations of organizational members. This view also takes seriously the notion that the organization and its changes are not objectively real phenomena (nor that there is agreement about them) that exist apart from the reality defined and ascribed to them by organizational members. In fact, there are likely to be multiple and competing discourses about change circulating at any given time. What does this view imply about the role of the OD practitioner? To fully appreciate the implications of the dialogic perspective on OD, we will postpone a more complete description of this perspective

until the next chapter, when it can be effectively contrasted with a classic diagnostic OD process.

At this point, you may be wondering which of these explanations of organizational change is the most appropriate one to use. Each offers benefits and contains drawbacks, making some elements of the organization visible while it obscures others. From a philosophical perspective, there are some fundamentally incongruous assumptions between the two schools of thought, so buying into multiple perspectives would seem impossible (e.g., the nature of organizational structure as representing an empirical reality versus being socially constructed).

From a practitioner's pragmatic view, however, each of these models offers unique insight into a client's environment. For some, what matters is not so much which model is right, but instead which model helps to facilitate additional understanding and is most consistent with both a practitioner's approach and the client's need. For example, in a highly structured hierarchical environment or in a stable organization not experiencing rapid change, clients may be more drawn to systems theory approaches. Alternately, in a rapidly changing or uncertain environment, practitioners may find it enlightening to examine a team's language during meetings to better understand how the team is arriving at decisions or how team member conflicts reflect different underlying assumptions. Using multiple models may also help to illuminate new aspects of a situation, since being overly wedded to one particular model may blind the practitioner to important information (Burke, 1993). What is important is to be conscious of the assumptions of the approach being taken and the consequences of those assumptions.

Practices in Leading Change

No matter the model of change that guides it, many scholars and practitioners believe that there are several practical steps and ideal leadership practices that will facilitate change. Kotter (1996) has outlined eight steps that leaders should follow in instituting a major change in their organizations:

1. *Establishing a sense of urgency.* Fight complacency about current performance by examining current performance and measuring it against competitors or other benchmarks.

2. *Creating the guiding coalition.* Build a team of energetic, capable leaders who have expertise and credibility to lead the change.

3. *Developing a vision and strategy.* Create an engaging description of the future and the path that will be taken to get there.

4. *Communicating the change vision.* Communicate regularly, using multiple media, in jargon-free language, what the change will mean and why organizational members should be enthusiastic.

(Continued)

(Continued)

5. *Empowering broad-based action.* Remove organizational, systemic, skill, and policy barriers to making the change successful.

6. *Generating short-term wins.* Implement a number of immediate and visible changes to prove the success of the change effort and provide motivation.

7. *Consolidating gains and producing more change.* Overcome the tendency to become complacent and continue to promote even greater changes.

8. *Anchoring new approaches in the culture.* Ensure that new employees and new leaders represent the desired culture. (p. 21)

Summary

Organizational change is the explicit purpose of most organization development work. Practitioners intervene in organizations at the individual level, at the level of group or team, with multiple groups or teams, at the whole organization level, and between organizations, states, or nations. Change can be planned or unplanned, one-time or continuous. It can also be first-order change, or minor modifications within existing patterns, or it can be second-order change, which are creations of new frameworks and patterns.

Scholars and practitioners have developed models and approaches to explain how change occurs, and each model has benefits and drawbacks. Some of these models are based in systems theory, seeing an organization as a set of input, throughput, output, and feedback processes. Lewin's three-phase approach to change as unfreezing, moving, and refreezing, as well as the Nadler-Tushman congruence model, the Burke-Litwin model of change, and Weisbord's Six-Box Model all are consistent with the basic tenets of systems theory. These models explain how change can be successful when the basic components of the organization fit together effectively, and that changes to one area often result in necessary and perhaps unintended changes to another area. A different approach to change has a social construction perspective at its core, which sees organizations as they emerge and unfold in communication patterns. This approach sees change as a continuous process rather than a specific project.

With a good understanding of organizational change, the OD practitioner can be more conscious of the most appropriate interventions that will help produce change. In the next chapter we will focus more specifically on the practitioner's role, how an OD practitioner works with a client, and the process that the OD practitioner follows during change.

Questions for Discussion

1. The chapter lists a number of models for organization and approaches to organizational change. Which model or approach appeals to you most? For example, are you drawn to a systems theory or social construction approach? Why?

2. Considering these models, and your own knowledge of organizations, develop your own model that could inform an OD practitioner leading an organizational change. What does your model include or leave out, and how does it differ from those in this chapter?

3. Search the Internet for the websites of organization development and other management consultants. Try to find an explicit or implicit model of organization or organizational change that they recommend. How do these relate to the approaches presented in this chapter?

For Further Reading

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Exercise: Using Organizational Change Models

Read the three descriptions below of organizational change projects. Use any of the models of or approaches to organizational change described in this chapter to analyze the situations.

Example 1

The director of the training department decided to implement an online system for tracking different projects that trainers were working on. Management wanted to use reports from the system for two reasons: first, to prove to senior executives that more trainers were needed, and second, to measure the productivity of the

trainers. Trainers were asked to log in to the system every week to describe the project, estimate how long it was anticipated to take, and update current progress on the project. Many employees were angry at having their work monitored so closely, and many believed that it was an attempt by management to determine which trainers were unproductive and could be laid off. Trainers responded by dividing projects into subprojects, and they began adding those subprojects into the system to demonstrate that they had more work to do than their colleagues. When three or four colleagues would collaborate on a project, each entered the work separately, making it appear that multiple projects were being worked on even though all entries referred to the same project. Eventually the system was shut down because it was not providing accurate information about the status of the department's workload.

Example 2

Committed to a "strengths-based" approach to education, one middle school principal announced that all students should have an opportunity to learn in a way that reflected their own learning styles. In an unprecedented move, she asked that all teachers reexamine their curricula to find ways to implement the new philosophy. This took teachers by surprise in a school that generally had a traditional and conservative approach to instruction. Many teachers at the school were unfamiliar with this approach, and no training was provided except for a brief overview given by the principal herself. Some teachers were reluctant to try what they termed "fringe" and "untested" techniques, while others felt that the approach was inconsistent with their personal teaching philosophy. Still others felt that the investment of time to do curriculum revisions would not be worth it. No teacher brought these concerns out into the open for fear of engaging in conflict with the principal. Teachers who did adopt the new method found that students appreciated the changes. Parents who found out about the approach began to complain to the principal that not enough classic "reading, writing, and arithmetic" work was being done in the classroom.

Example 3

Owners of a block of condominium units in a suburban city were struggling to find buyers for units in a building that had recently been completed. Market research from the owners, which was supported by statistics from the city planning department, indicated that new, younger residents to the city could not afford the sales price and that they preferred rental units as well. Owners petitioned the city to change one of the condominium buildings to an apartment building. In addition, to take advantage of government incentives, they wanted to make it the city's first affordable housing complex. At the city council meeting, residents who lived close to the building complained that they did not want "low income" housing in the city. Some argued that rental units would eventually become "run down" by careless

short-term residents. Other citizens supported the proposal's attempt to bring a diverse energy to the city that would become popular with local artists and students. The city council decided to convene a task force to study the city's policies and practices with respect to affordable housing. Current and prospective residents came together in a series of forums sponsored by the city to agree on a plan that had the support of both groups.