

A Lexicon For Organizational Change: Examining The Use Of Language In Popular, Practitioner, And Scholar Periodicals

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Abstract

This study presents an examination of the ambiguity surrounding the language of organizational change. The purpose is to unearth patterns in how language is used to describe major organizational change. A sample of 15 journals that spanned 15 years (2168 issues) were examined from three categories. The results provided 14 different relevant terms for organizational change. The most emphasized term is organizational transformation. The article also conducts a within domain examination that sheds light on the gap between practice and research. Labels and definitions are proposed. Directions and prescriptions for the future are also discussed.

Introduction

“The more things change, the more they stay the same.” This old adage may ring true for many facets of our lives, but it certainly does not apply to the business world. As markets become more global, and therefore more competitive, the context in which businesses in all industries operate changes daily (Hammer & Champy, 1993; Dunphy & Stace, 1990; Head, 1997; Kirkpatrick, 1985; Nadler, 1998). Firms cannot afford to fall behind their competitors. Perhaps a more appropriate adage for business is, “If you snooze, you lose.”

Each of us has experienced change. We have seen changes in our personal lives — from

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the day we were born until the day we die, our lives are constantly in a state of flux as we progress through various stages. We have also witnessed changes in our places of work (e.g., mergers, new management teams, technological advances, and plant or division closings), in our neighborhoods (e.g., people’s moving in and moving out), and even in our families (e.g., marriages and deaths).

Personal change can be identified, somewhat easily (e.g., Bowman & Singh, 1993; Bruton, Oviatt, & White, 1994; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Nadler, 1998). For example, it’s easy to label and understand a life-changing event such as college graduation. The line of demarcation (going through a ceremony and receiving a degree), as well as the implications (no longer attending undergraduate classes, and

hopefully getting a better job), of the change are clear. However, changes that affect entire organizations are not blessed with such clarity (Miller & Friesen, 1980; Mohrman et. al., 1989; Nadler, 1998; Smither, et. al., 1996).

Recently, organizational change has received increased attention from popular business press, practitioners, and researchers (e.g., Bowman and Singh, 1993; Fiorelli & Margolis, 1993; Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Miller & Friesen, 1980; Mohrman et. al., 1989; Porras & Silvers, 1991; Nadler, 1998; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). For example, the Academy of Management (1999) states that it is poised to take seriously the need to explain how and why change journeys unfold. The Academy further explains that the universe is pluralistic and in continuous flux. "The increasing pace of change in jobs, organizations, industries, and economies leads us to recognize that change is an ongoing dynamic journey, not a discrete event that shifts from one unfreezing order to another frozen state" (p. 1).

This attention to and analysis of organizational change can lead us to better understand what causes major changes within an organization and how to ensure that such changes progress successfully and efficiently. However, these potential benefits will be realized only if the discourse surrounding the topic of organizational change leads us toward a clearer understanding of organizational change. A prerequisite for developing that clearer understanding is to develop a standard lexicon that can be used to discuss the phenomenon of interest.

The purpose of this article is to examine 15 years of discourse on organizational change in order to unearth patterns in how the terminology is used to label change. To do so, we reviewed 15 years of articles from 15 major business journals. In the process, we discovered that a variety of different terms are used to describe major organizational changes. Our concern is that the variety of terms used within the discourse may

serve as an impediment to understanding, and therefore to the development of sound and comprehensive theory on the topic of organizational change. More specifically, the use of such a plethora of terms, each with different shades of meaning, may prevent us from reaching a common definition, and therefore a common understanding, of what organizational change is. Such a common base is necessary in order for the discourse to move us toward a better understanding of the phenomenon of organizational change.

The first section of this article summarizes our review of the literature on organizational change. The second section discusses the methodology of our analysis of the different terms used to label organizational change in the publications of three distinct audiences: popular business press, practitioners, and scholars. The third section presents our findings, and the fourth section offers a discussion of the findings and their potential implications. We conclude by proposing a uniform label and definition for organizational change and explicating the need for future research in the area.

Literature Review: Finding Common Ground

During periods of radically changing environments, adapting is not enough. Adaptation is merely a slow process of improvement, involving incremental or transitional changes while the existing structures become obsolete (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996; Head, 1997). When major changes in the business environment occur, they generally require completely different organizational characteristics. If organizations are to survive, they need to transform themselves into different types of organizations with the most suitable characteristics for the new environment (Hammer & Champy, 1993).

This theory of evolution as applied to organizations, in which slow change is punctuated with sudden radical change that threatens survival (Tushman & O'Reilly, 1996), explains why organizations of today are in serious tur-

moil. The current technological and global changes are shifting the nature of the business environment. Businesses need to adapt quickly to meet the challenge of survival brought on by the changes in their environment. Will organizations succeed in their endeavors to change? Are practitioners prepared to handle these massive changes? Do consultants and practitioners have enough well-founded knowledge to adequately guide business leaders? Have research scholars been able to provide enough empirically supported theory on how organizations change in order to facilitate successful implementation?

These questions highlight the distinct, yet inextricable relationship among the popular business press, practitioner, and scholar perspectives. The popular business press focuses on businesses' current trends, as well as events of interest and intrigue. Practitioners, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with how to successfully implement major organizational changes and create more effective organizations. Finally, scholars tend to focus on grasping the predictive nature of organizational change and building theory that sheds light on this phenomenon. Clearly, each perspective has its own area of interest, which is different yet related to each other.

Mohrman and colleagues (1989) have suggested that if anyone is going to understand what causes interventions to fail or succeed, we need to work together to paint the metaphorical "big picture" of the entire context within which the change occurs. There are too many factors involved in organizational change to believe that one perspective could analyze it all and do it accurately and comprehensively. We need to learn from all available perspectives. A team of people, spanning across disciplines and perspectives, who pull their knowledge together, is necessary to fully describe the context—how all the factors are interrelated and how they react to the interventions.

Need for More Theory

Despite the multiple audiences that have written about and discussed the concept of major organizational change, we have yet to witness the evolution of a comprehensive theory. A major obstacle blocking the path to better theory is the multitude of words and labels used in the lexicon of major organizational change. Researchers agree that it is a relatively "ill-defined" construct that is in its developing stages (Cummings & Worley, 1993; Mohrman et. al., 1989; Pilarz, 1990; Porras & Silvers, 1991). Eleven years ago, Kilmann & Covin (1988) stated that, "full consensus on this concept among academics and practitioners cannot be expected at this time" (p. 2). Today, we believe that such a consensus is still lacking.

Regardless of the reason for the lack of theory, its implications are clear. Porras and Robertson (1987) suggest that without important guiding theory, practitioners can readily be "influenced by their personal goals and values (Tichy, 1975), their cognitive styles, (Slocum, 1978), or their familiarity and facility with specific techniques (Porras & Patterson, 1979)" (Porras & Robertson, 1987, p. 2). Additionally, they demonstrate that evaluation can be a problem without proper guiding theory. They refer to Bass (1983) who noted that theory needs to specify what outcomes constitute success. He also noted that theory is important in that it dictates *when* outcomes are to be measured. This point is important because measuring at the wrong time can lead to inaccuracies and misleading conclusions (Porras & Robertson, 1987).

Clearly, the development of better theory on organizational change would be a major asset. It could provide grounds for better research, which in turn could lead to better recommendations for how to implement successful changes, and even better methods of measuring the success of changes that have already taken place. Thus, "[p]lanned organizational change would no longer have to be a shotgun, hit or

miss, highly intuitive approach” (Porrás & Robertson, 1987, pp.52-53).

There is good reason for the confusion around what to call major organizational change, how to define it, and how to approach studying it. The complexity of the phenomenon has resulted in a variety of labels and definitions from such scattered disciplines as organization development, social psychology, organizational ecology, and strategy research. The research in these disciplines provides insights, yet most definitions remain muddled and ambiguous.

Research Objectives

Our objectives for this article are simple, yet potentially seminal. We will:

- determine the emphasis with which different labels for major organizational change are used, and
- examine the convergence (i.e., common patterns) and divergence (i.e., unique patterns) in use of language that describes major change across three domains (popular business press, practitioner, and research), in order to
- determine the most widely accepted label for the variety of audiences, and
- propose a uniform label and definition from which future discussion can progress and from which a more solid theory of organizational change can emerge.

There is an important reason to have an agreed-upon lexicon for change. If there is agreement on the label, then research can flourish under the same domain, and knowledge can be built more readily from study to study. However, in order for this to occur, there needs to be a basic agreement about what the label refers to;

areas of confusion or disagreement need to be clarified. Good theories and models encourage research, “but first a solid understanding of the phenomenon is needed” (Mohrman et. al., 1989).

Methodology

Terms and Sample

In order to evaluate the use of language, an extensive list of terms was collected through a review of the literature. All terms that related to major change as a comprehensive alteration of an organization were included (e.g., strategy, structure, processes, and culture). This review resulted in a master list of 22 terms to test (See Table 1).

Table 1	
Final List of Selected Terms	
Term	Term
Discontinuous Change	Radical Change
Divestiture	Reengineering
Frame Bending Change	Reorganization
Frame-breaking Change	Reorientation
Gamma Change	Restructuring
Large Systems Change	Second-Order Change (2nd-order)
Large-Scale Change	Strategic Change
Large-Scale Systems Change	System-Wide Change
Merger	Third-Order Change
Paradigmatic Change	Transformation
Quantum Change	Whole Systems Change

We tested the terms with a sample of 15 reputable periodicals, 5 from each of three categories: popular business, practitioner, and scholar. The periodicals were chosen based on meeting four criteria:

- They were evaluated as credible and respected by five experts who have published, researched, and used periodicals across all three domains.
- The citation, abstract, and key words were available in electronic form.
- The electronic information was available without interruption from 1988-1998.

- The issue frequency of each periodical was between bi-weekly and quarterly.

Based on these criteria, five periodicals were chosen from each of the three perspective categories. All periodicals, except *Academy of Management Executive (AME)*, were available for more than 10 years. We, therefore, decided to expand the number of years examined to 15 years, while including *AME*. Table 2 shows the final list of journals chosen for the sample, by category.

- The term(s) was a focus of the article as indicated by its presence in the title, abstract, or key words.
- The term was used in reference to a comprehensive alteration of an organization (e.g., strategy, structure, processes, and culture).
- The term was used in reference to an organization, in the broadest sense (e.g., public or private, government or non-government, profit or non-profit).

Table 2
Final List of Periodicals in Sample

Category and Periodical Title	Years Available	Published (No. of Issues/Year)
<u>Popular Business Press</u>		
Fortune	1971-	Bi-weekly (26)
Forbes	1971-	Bi-weekly (26)
Inc.	1979-	Monthly (12)
Industry Week	1972-	Bi-weekly (26)
Nation's Business	1971-	Monthly (12)
<u>Practitioner</u>		
Academy of Management Executive	1987-	Quarterly (4)
California Management Review	1971-	Quarterly (4)
Harvard Business Review	1971-	Bi-monthly (6)
Journal of Business Strategy	1980-	Bi-monthly (6)
Sloan Management Review	1972-	Quarterly (4)
<u>Scholarly</u>		
Academy of Management Journal	1971-	Bi-monthly (6)
Academy of Management Review	1976-	Quarterly (4)
Administrative Science Quarterly	1971-	Quarterly (4)
Journal of Business	1972-	Quarterly (4)
Strategic Management Journal	1980-	Monthly (12)

Periodicals that referred to, for example, "restructuring the tax code" were excluded from the relevant count.

Analysis

The weighted average by journal was calculated as follows. The number of abstracts for each term was tabulated by journal. Then the total number of issues for each journal was calculated. This was accomplished by taking the number of issues per year, and multiplying it by the number of years searched. Then, the weighted-average for each journal was calculated by taking the term's frequency and dividing it by the total number of issues for that particular journal. The resulting total gave a weighted-average score (reported as a percentage) that could be compared with those of other journals, even if they contained a different number of issues per year.

Procedure

Since the purpose of the data collection was to determine the pattern in use of terms, a frequency coding was chosen. Each article was coded as relevant (1) or non-relevant (0), according to pre-established criteria as follows:

Weighted averages were also calculated across the three categories in a similar manner. First, the number of abstracts for each term was tabulated by category. Then, the total number of issues for each category was calculated. This was accomplished by adding the total number of

issues, over the entire sample period, for each journal in the category. Then, the weighted average for each category was calculated by taking the total frequency and dividing it by the total number of issues of that particular category. The resulting total gave a weighted-average score that could be compared across the other categories, which contained a different number of total issues.

Finally, an overall total weighted-average was calculated for each term. Using a similar calculation as above, the total frequency for each term across the entire sample was calculated. Then, the total number of issues of all journals across all years was calculated. Finally, the total frequency was divided by the total number of issues in the sample. This resulted in an overall total average score for each term, comparable across terms.

Results

The sample was made up of 2168 issues from 15 journals. A total of 22 terms was tested within and across the three domains. Table 3 provides the descriptive statistics. The frequency occurrence reflects the number of articles that applied the term in the context of major organizational change. An overall percentage average was calculated in order to compare frequencies across journals, as described in the methodology section.

The 15 journals in the overall sample revealed a total of 14 terms from the master list that were used to label major organizational change. The frequency of term usage ranged from a rate of 480 for restructuring, to a rate of one for frame-breaking change.

To better understand the degree of usage of terms within each category, Tables 4 through 6 illustrate the results from each of the three categories. In order to compare across domains, averages were calculated based on the number of issues in each category. The popular

Table 3
Terms Found in the Sample,
Overall by Frequency

<u>Terms Searched</u>	<u>Overall Totals</u> (Total Issues = 2168)	
	<u>Overall Total Freq.</u>	<u>Overall Total Avg.</u>
Restructuring	480	22.14
Merger	393	18.13
Transformation	162	7.47
Reorganization	140	6.46
Reengineering	124	5.72
Divestiture	84	3.87
Radical Change	47	2.17
Strategic Change	36	1.66
Discontinuous Change	11	0.51
Reorientation	9	0.42
Gamma Change	7	0.32
Large-Scale Change	7	0.32
Second-Order Change (2nd-order)	2	0.09
Frame-breaking Change	1	0.05

business press sub-sample had 1428 issues, the practitioner sub-sample had 320 issues, and the scholarly sub-sample had 420 issues.

Table 4 presents the results for the business journals, sorted by frequency. The four highest-ranking frequencies are restructuring, merger, reorganization, and transformation. Comparison scores for these terms are as follows: restructuring = 25.70%; merger = 22.37%; reorganization = 7.35%; and transformation = 6.09%. In Table 5, the results of the terms searched in the practitioner journals are reviewed by frequency. Comparison scores for these terms are as follows: restructuring = 25.31%; transformation 15.31%; reengineering = 15.00%; and merger = 13.75%. Table 6 presents the results from the scholar journals by frequency. Comparison scores for these terms are as follows: restructuring = 7.62%; merger = 7.38%; transformation = 6.19%; and strate-

Table 4
Terms Found in Sample,
Popular Business Category

<u>Terms Searched</u>	<u>Popular Business Press</u> <u>(Total Issues = 1428)</u>	
	<u>Total Freq.</u>	<u>Total Avg.</u>
Restructuring	367	25.70
Merger	318	22.37
Reorganization	105	7.35
Transformation	87	6.09
Reengineering	75	5.25
Divestiture	61	4.27
Radical Change	19	1.33
Strategic Change	4	0.28
Reorientation	2	0.14
Large-Scale Change	2	0.14
Discontinuous Change	0	0
Gamma Change	0	0
Second-Order Change (2nd-order)	0	0
Frame-breaking Change	0	0

gic change 5.71%. To better compare the frequencies based on averages, Table 7 presents the terms in rank order by the highest average.

Discussion

As identified in the results section, the sample of 15 journals (2168 issues) produced 14 different relevant terms and variations referring to major organizational change. The five most frequently used terms were, in respective order: restructuring, merger, transformation, reorganization, and reengineering. These top five terms were emphasized with a 60% score in the sample and provided 82% of the relevant articles.

The popularity of the term reengineering, a relatively new term that has been used only since the early 1990s, is notable. It was the fifth most common term and was used by both popular business press and practitioners. Its use by scholars, however, was rather limited, as it received a 0.24% score.

A unique finding was that transformation, a non-technical term, was the third most frequently used term across all perspectives. Such a finding was unexpected in that despite the term’s non-technical nature, business analysts, practitioners, and scholars still used it.

Difference Across and Within Categories

The results of the analysis also reveal differences across the three categories of journals (popular business, practitioner, and research). The categories differ in the degree of term usage. Restructuring was the most recently used term in each of the three categories. The differences began with the second highest ranked term.

Popular periodicals. From the results, we infer that the popular business periodicals prefer the traditional business labels for organizational change, with the exception of the terms transformation and reengineering. These periodicals’ preference for traditional terms is evident from the gap separating the two most frequently used terms from the rest. Restructuring and merger, both traditional business terms and the top two most frequently used terms, were each used over three times as frequently as newer terms such as reorganization, transformation, and reengineering (the third through fifth most frequently used terms).

Practitioner periodicals. Table 4 indicates that practitioners tend to use established business terms as well as other terms that business people will use, such as reengineering, transformation and radical change. Perhaps these findings should not be surprising—just as business practitioners strive to keep up with the latest methods, products, and ideas in order to remain competitive, so also do they use the latest jargon or “buzzwords” in their business speak.

Scholarly periodicals. An extremely important finding in this study is the paucity of research on this subject. In the results from this study,

Table 5
Terms Found in Sample,
Practitioner Category

<u>Terms Searched</u>	<u>Practitioner</u> <u>(Total Issues = 320)</u>	
	<u>Total Freq.</u>	<u>Total Avg.</u>
Restructuring	81	25.31
Transformation	49	15.31
Reengineering	48	15.00
Merger	44	13.75
Reorganization	23	7.19
Divestiture	18	5.63
Radical Change	16	5.00
Strategic Change	8	2.50
Discontinuous Change	6	1.88
Reorientation	5	1.56
Large-Scale Change	4	1.25
Frame-breaking Change	1	0.31
Gamma Change	0	0
Second-Order Change (2nd-order)	0	0

Table 6
Terms Found in Sample,
Scholar Category

<u>Terms Searched</u>	<u>Scholar</u> <u>(Total Issues = 420)</u>	
	<u>Total Freq.</u>	<u>Total Avg.</u>
Restructuring	32	7.62
Merger	31	7.38
Transformation	26	6.19
Strategic Change	24	5.71
Radical Change	12	2.86
Reorganization	12	2.86
Gamma Change	7	1.67
Discontinuous Change	5	1.19
Divestiture	5	1.19
Reorientation	2	0.48
Second-Order Change (2nd-order)	2	0.48
Large-Scale Change	1	0.24
Reengineering	1	0.24
Frame-breaking Change	0	0

popular business press received a 73% score and practitioners received a 95% score, whereas scholarly periodicals received only a 38% score. While the most frequently used term in both the popular business and practitioner periodicals appeared received a 25% score, the most popular term in the scholarly periodicals received only 7.62% score. This highlights the dramatically lower emphasis by scholars. Clearly, business scholars have fallen behind the popular and practitioner press in the discourse on major organizational change.

A Proposed Label for the Concept of Major Organizational Change

This study supports the proposition that there is a wide variety of terms already used to refer to the phenomenon of major organizational change. Despite this vast array of labels, the terms restructuring, merger, and transformation are all widely accepted and frequently used by

all three perspectives discussed in the study. Given this information, it would make sense to select one of these three terms to be the term used to consistently label major organizational changes. But which one should it be?

Upon closer examination of these terms, we note that restructuring is a narrowly defined technical term and that merger has a legal definition. Such fine-tuned definitions are good for describing specific types of organizational changes (e.g., merger may be the term that best describes the unique way the Daimler and Chrysler have come together). However, when we select the term that will serve as the primary label for discourse on the concept of major organizational change, we need a more theoretical term—a term that can serve as an umbrella under which many different kinds of organizational change will fall.

Table 7
Terms Found in the Sample,
Comparisons by Average

<u>Terms Searched</u>	<u>Overall Averages</u>		
	<u>Popular Business</u>	<u>Practitioner</u>	<u>Scholarly</u>
	<u>Total Issues</u> (1428)	<u>Total Issues</u> (320)	<u>Total Issues</u> (420)
Restructuring	25.70	25.31	7.62
Merger	22.37	13.75	7.38
Transformation	6.09	15.31	6.19
Reengineering	5.25	15.00	0.60
Reorganization	7.35	7.19	2.86
Strategic Change	0.28	2.50	5.71
Divestiture	4.27	5.63	1.19
Radical Change	1.33	5.00	2.86
Discontinuous Change	0	1.88	1.19
Gamma Change	0	0	1.67
Reorientation	0.14	1.56	0.48
Large-Scale Change	0.14	1.25	0.24
Second-Order Change (2nd-order)	0	0	0.48
Frame-breaking Change	0	0.31	0

For these reasons, we argue that the term transformation is the best candidate for becoming the single label used to identify the phenomenon of major organizational change. Clearly, the term transformation lends itself well to further subdivisions (e.g., merger, restructuring, and reengineering), which provides the flexibility needed to advance the development of theory. While these subdimensions can be considered under the umbrella of transformation, they don't ensure that a transformation has occurred.

The term transformation is broad. Thus, it can capture many different kinds of organizational changes. For example, the aforementioned merger of DaimlerChrysler would fall under the umbrella of organizational transformation, but not under other terms such as restructuring or reengineering. A merger can invariably lead to a restructuring and maybe even some

reengineering efforts. In order for this change to be considered a transformation, however, it must see an alteration in the organization's strategy, structure, processes, and culture. We will discuss this definition next.

We further propose that the subdimensions of transformation fall under two categories: legal and technical. Legally defined transformational change has some pre-established legal definition. Whereas, the technical subdimensions incorporates terms that define change with specific identifiable characteristics that have a technical purpose in the organization. The terms in these two categories, as

stated, do not imply that a transformation has occurred, rather they are a form of organizational change that can lead to transformation. In essence, these types of change are necessary, but not sufficient enough to be designated as transformative in nature.

We encourage that any terms and their respective definitions that are developed to describe change address four kinds of validity questions. Does the term appear to make sense with respect to the stated type of change – face validity? This refers to how easily understood the term is at its face and how well it is readily understood by the reader (Anastasi, 1988). Can the term be easily distinguished from other terms – discriminant validity? Discriminant validity is a measure of how distinguishable one term is from other terms. That is, one term must not correlate too highly with other terms or it is not distinguishable from them (Kerlinger, 1970). Is

the term predictive – internal validity? Internal validity is an assessment of the term's relevance to the results. The intent is to assess whether or not application of the term significantly explains important relationships (French & Bell, 1995). Is the term applicable across populations, settings, treatment variables, and measurement variables – external validity? In essence, this is the degree to which the term can be readily applied to other situations and environments (French & Bell, 1995).

A Proposed Definition of Organizational Transformation

Along with the proposed label, we present a definition of transformation as follows:

Organizational transformation is a change that alters an entire organization, including strategy, structure, core processes, power distribution, controls systems, culture, and people's work.

We specifically identify transformation as the term of choice over other similar terms from the list (i.e., discontinuous change, frame bending change, frame-breaking change, gamma change, large systems change, large-scale change, paradigmatic change, quantum change, radical change, reorientation, second-order change, strategic change, system-wide change, third-order change, whole systems change). Unless these other terms can be shown to have their own validity, they should be considered synonymous with transformation. We do not wish to de-emphasize the importance of the contributions above, rather we wish to encourage research that has been conducted in these various areas to be integrated. Further, we encourage scholars to consider our proposition as they further develop theories and build new models related to transformation. We will draw from various scholars as we further develop the proposed definition of transformation.

Although many authors note the potential for senior management to fuel change (e.g.,

Hammer & Champy, 1993; Greiner & Bhambri, 1989; Head, 1997; Jick, 1993; Nadler, 1998; Nadler & Tushman, 1989; Porras & Silvers, 1991; Smither, et. al., 1996), transformations do not necessarily require the leadership of top management or even a focused program designed to initiate and guide the change. The nature of the relationship among these concepts provides important questions for the development and enhancement of the theory surrounding transformation.

Transformation often occurs in response to: a.) the external environment as a threat for survival (Bowman & Singh, 1993; Cummings & Worley, 1993; Dunphy & Stace, 1990; Greiner & Bhambri, 1989; Levy, 1986; Nadler, 1998; Porras & Silvers, 1991; Sheldon, 1980; Tushman, Newman, & Romanelli, 1986); b.) an opportunity to create a niche (Levy, 1986; Nadler, 1998); or c.) internal events such as an unexpected decline in performance (Levy, 1986), a new leadership team (Torbert, 1989), or defection of customers (Smither, et. al., 1996). These events require a radical departure from existing practice (Hammer & Champy, 1993), as well as a shift in worldviews among members of the organization (Bartunek & Franzak, 1988; Bartunek & Louis, 1988; Bartunek & Moch, 1987; Hammer & Champy, 1993; Levy, 1986; Porras & Silvers, 1991; Sheldon, 1980). Members must not only change their views of the world around them, but also their views of themselves in order to ensure that they are aligned with the new strategy and redesigned organizational dimensions. It usually requires them to work, think, behave, and "see" differently. The result is a set of entirely new ways of operating and relating to the environment.

The intended outcomes of transformation can include: (a) alignment of the multiple organizational dimensions and members with the new strategy (Barczak, Smith, & Wilemon, 1987); (b) alignment of the organization with its environment (Fiorelli & Margolis, 1993; Greiner & Bhambri, 1989; Porras & Silvers, 1991); (c)

significantly higher levels of organizational performance (Hammer, 1995; Mohrman et. al., 1989; Smither, et. al., 1996); and (d) future organizational sustainability (Hammer & Champy, 1993; Kilmann & Covin, 1988).

Although these changes are intense and usually need to be initiated simultaneously and quickly, it can take two years before signs of progress can be seen (Bendix, 1994; Smither et. al., 1996) and up to 10 years before the changes are solidified (Fiorelli & Margolis, 1993). Leaders need to know how long this type of change effort takes, and to be willing to commit the necessary resources for the duration of the entire effort if it is to have a chance of succeeding.

Limitations

This study covered the evaluation of terminology emphasis in 15 well-respected periodicals in three categories: popular business, practitioner, and research. Thus, the scores given are limited to the sample studied, yet the researchers believe that they portray a fairly accurate picture of the over-emphasis on how to implement successful change strategies and an under-emphasis on building sound theory around how organizations actually transform themselves.

Another possible limitation of this study is that the percentage score compared the number of times the different terms were mentioned by using a per-issue frequency. This score, therefore, provides a sense of the topic coverage across issues. It does not provide an exact percentage for the number of articles. Future research should conduct a study within the context of the total articles published. This would allow for analysis of trends across the years to unearth additional patterns such as the degree of emphasis by year.

Suggestions for Future Research

Research needs to build sound theory of

organizational transformation. This process can begin by empirically testing the components of the above-proposed definition. In addition to testing the definition, there are some other concepts that are especially important to develop and test empirically. They are specified below.

If change is to become smoother and less painful for all involved, it is imperative that the degree of pervasiveness of the change is well understood. Pervasiveness covers the topic of attitude change in people, which is one of the greatest challenges in conducting organizational transformations. What can be done so that the people of the organization not only "see" the new vision, but believe in it and want to make it work? A recent implementation strategy focused on this idea (Adams, 1997; Bunker & Alban, 1997; Head, 1997). The authors refer to this as whole systems change. The problem, as mentioned earlier, is this research may not be integrated with other transformational change research. It is necessary that the validity distinctions be made with regard to this type of change, and if it is not unique, then it should be considered a part of transformation theory. In addition, more empirical research needs to be done in this area to provide data and results regarding its effectiveness and what factors contribute to its success or failure.

As we previously noted, the word transformation was distinct from the other top five labels in that it is not a technical business term, as are restructuring, merger, and reorganization. Given this difference, why was transformation so widely accepted among all three audiences? Research needs to be done if we are to answer this question. More specifically, an investigation into the linguistic features of widely accepted terms could move us toward an answer. A possible implication of this research is that it may help practitioners and researchers choose labels that the business community is more likely to adopt, and it may help to focus the presently-scattered discourse on organizational change by generating a standard terminology.

The use of a widely accepted label helps to create a place where anecdotal and empirical evidence from numerous disciplines can be assembled. This foundation facilitates the growth of standard knowledge and provides a base upon which to build further understanding. It is important to gather and synthesize the diverse existing knowledge on organizational transformation because information and knowledge can grow faster when placed within a language and context with which diverse audiences are familiar. The implications of such a growth in knowledge on organizational transformation are clear. Only when we can predict proper implementation strategies will we be able to pave a smooth path toward successful transformation and overcome the ill effects of inefficiency. ☞

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