

Experiencing Organizational Change: Types of Change across Levels and its Critical Context

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Abstract

Although organizational change has been studied extensively, research on the experience of this process has not received its due attention. The focus of this paper is to highlight the importance of understanding the experience of organizational change. Based on an organizational change intervention and having conversations and feedback from organizational members, we realize the complexity of the experience of organizational change and its multifaceted nature based on the experiences at different organizational levels. This paper establishes the need to expand beyond existing models and explores organizational change from the perspective of Chaos Theory, general processes of change, the four Ideal-Types as presented by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) especially that of the Quad-Motor Change process. As organizations are really human systems, it is proposed that juxtaposing general change processes, the four Ideal-Types and Chaos Theory would help us understand organizational change as a holistic process involving human systems during organizing. The findings from this paper show that the experience of organizational change is a complex one (experienced differently across organizational levels) and central to the success of the

change process is the need to create a psychologically safe context for managers and leaders of organizations to have conversations with their members. This paper highlights the significance of conversations as part of understanding organizations and the organizing process. From this perspective, managers and leaders in the 21st century can learn to create successful organizational change.

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Introduction

Organizational change has become synonymous with organizational life. Although change may be one of the most studied topic in organization theory (Cunha & Cunha, 2003), organizational change has been studied extensively as a phenomenon it and of itself but only a few researchers and practitioners have dealt with such change across all levels of an organization as experienced by those involved. Having been involved and leading projects on change within organizations, and speaking to members about how they experienced change has inspired us to study this phenomenon in more detail. As not all organizational change has been successful, practitioners, researchers and organizational leaders/managers have been trying to understand how to create more constructive (or positive) change. With the emergent focus on the significance of understanding context during change, how do we create an organizational context that generates experiences that can be constructive and not destructive during an organizational change process? We do not want to reinvent the concept of helping and hindering forces. Instead, we intend to focus on the core (the critical context) from which such positive and negative experiences evolve or emerge. This paper focuses on understanding the experience of organizational change from a case study of an organization going through a significant change process. After explaining change models and obtaining feedback from organizational members, change is experienced differently across levels and the significance of context (one involving human interaction and communication) was considered critical to the success of the change. In this paper, we submit that experiencing organizational change (although highly complex) can be explained by understanding the context from which positive and negative experiences develop. We propose that the positive and negative experiences of organizational change are generated by a fundamental human interactive process: conversations.

Apart from defining organizations as conversations (Ford, 1999) or as a network of conversations (Broekstra, 1998), numerous researchers have positioned conversations as an important aspect of organizational change efforts (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Beer, Eisenhart, & Spector, 1990; Ford & Backoff, 1988). We define conversational contexts within organizations as the physical and psychological space where human interaction and communication occurs. The inherent characteristic of such spaces suggest that such spaces are both as experienced (i.e. Real) and that members would like to have (i.e. Ideal). Our objectives for this paper are: 1. to show that at different levels of organizations, all four Ideal types of change (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) are present but experienced differently; 2. to propose (based on conversations and feedback from organizational members) that the evolution of positive or negative experiences to these types of change depends on the provision of “conversational spaces” (or forums); and 3. such spaces would allow the surfacing and working with these experiences (and needs) during an organizational change process. More specifically, we will first explore the general change processes in the natural sciences (as we believe that conversation—human interaction and communication—is core and fundamental to our nature), and compare these processes with that of the Ideal Types of change proposed by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) with the hope of developing a way to understand and study the experience of organizational change permeating throughout all levels of an organization, and the core from which these experiences emanate, based on a case study of an organization going through significant change. This study contributes to the emergent trend of organizational researchers and practitioners focusing on the importance and significance of context (Mowday & Sutton, 1993) that has been defined as an element of organizational learning (Bokeno, 2003), shifting conversations (Cox, 2004; Bryant and Cox, 2003); holding environments (Kahn, 2004), community centers (Ogbonna & Harris, 2003); discourse (Watson, 2004); studying strategic conversations (Maitlis, 2005); conversational learning (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002); and measuring and mapping conversational spaces (Lingham,

2004). We believe that this study would help researchers, practitioners, and most importantly, leaders, managers and organizational members to realize the “real context” that is critical during the change process.

Although we were involved in numerous organizational change interventions, it was in a particular intervention at a Midwestern institute of higher education that triggered our journey of exploration to understand and focus on the experience of organizational change. The organization change was a complex one: it involved major structural changes to a building (renovations) which included moving offices and people to different locations in the building (which is much worse than having students change seats in a classroom); an expansion of work for individual members beyond their established scope as some of them have to be let go or be transferred to another location; informing stakeholders (including students) about this change and feeling the repercussions from their dissatisfaction or frustrations; moving archive information to another location in a separate building; and creating new policies and procedures. In meeting with them, and after hearing all they had to deal with, a retreat for all members (except skeletal staff) was planned to use this as an opportunity to reframe this change as positive and one where individual members can contribute to the betterment of the organization.

During the retreat, different theories of organizational change were presented together with the importance of psychological safety as an important aspect of the process. Finally, we presented the four Ideal types of organizational change from a meta-analysis conducted by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) to help the members understand how change has been explained. After the management presented the different aspects of the change they are undergoing, members gathered to discuss (in groups within their separate functions/departments) which Ideal type (or types) of change would accurately describe their experience of the change process. After a one hour in-depth discussion

each group reported that all four Ideal Types were experienced depending on which level was focused on. The participants presented their experiences at the intra- and inter-personal levels, within and between group levels, and finally across levels within the organization. The report outs from each group highlighted a profound similarity: at different levels individuals and groups experienced organizational change differently. Although the participants concluded that the experience involved all four Ideal types of change based on the taxonomies developed by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) an interesting finding that at each level certain Ideal types were common. This finding begs the question: “How is organizational change experienced by organizational members across different levels within an organization?” Another significant finding was the fact that all participants requested that at each level a psychologically safe forum (or space) be provided for members to raise and address the issues and needs individuals or groups face based on their experiences. A direct supervisor should attend these conversational spaces so that these experiences can percolate upward to ensure positive change throughout the organization. This was perhaps the most interesting finding in this study: the need to create a context that is critical to the positive movement toward the change. A second question that needs to be explored is: “What are the members’ Real experienced contexts and the Ideal contexts members would like to have that would contribute to successful organizational change?”

To answer these two questions, we will first present a general overview of organizational change; highlight fundamental change processes from the natural sciences (to permit expansion from accepted organizational change models) and compare the characteristics of the change process to better understand the experience of organizational change as a phenomenon across all levels in organizations. We then propose how the experience of organizational change at all four different levels of an organization involves all four Ideal Types in different ways and focus on conversational spaces as core to such experiences. We finally provide

examples of mappings of conversational spaces in three groups at different levels or cross levels involved in the change process that was used to help the organization create conversational spaces more aligned with the Ideal spaces and its immediate impact on the positive organizational change.

The Juxtaposition of General Change Processes and the Ideal Type Change Processes in the Experience of Organizational Change

General Change Processes. Change is a naturally occurring phenomenon, which has been studied and labeled in myriad ways. Change has been defined as a planned or unplanned response to pressures and forces, and that these pressures can be considered obstacles, challenges, threats, or opportunities (Jick, 1993). One might add that it is not just the forces that provoke change, but that it also involves how these forces and their potencies are interpreted or experienced. With this in mind, even though one might suggest that there are temporary change process (which is reversible) and permanent change process (which is irreversible), every change is a process which could be broadly labeled into four general types: 1) Linear non-dynamic; 2) Linear dynamic; 3) Non-linear dynamic; 4) and Chaotic change.

The Four Ideal-Type Change Processes. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) discussed and highlighted four ideal type theories of social change as follows: Life-Cycle; Evolution; Dialectic; and Teleological theories. These four ideal types were identified after reviewing 200,000 titles, perusing 2000 abstracts, reading about 200 articles, and identifying 20 different processes (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995:513 footnotes). In this section we juxtapose the general change processes and the Ideal types of change (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995) based on

the reports from the organizational members from this case study on the experience of organizational change.

In this section we present the relationship between the general change processes and the Ideal types of change and how organizational members described each of these change processes based on their experience of organizational change.

Linear Non-Dynamic (Life-Cycle)

A linear non-dynamic system is one where the new state is a result of the previous state being acted upon by some force. Linear systems are described by linear equations (Parker, 1996). Such change processes are represented as causal models, static models, having an order, or that the states can be accurately determined. Such a change process is also one where the next state can be easily predicted based on the previous states. There is an absence of a feedback loop in the linear non-dynamic change process. Once we introduce the notion of a feedback loop, the process becomes a linear dynamic process. As suggested by Van de Ven and Poole (1995) The Life Cycle Ideal Type of change is based on the metaphor of organic growth where change is imminent and mediated by immanent logic, rules, or program that go with the entity's development. This ideal theory suggests a unitary sequence – one that is cumulative and conjunctive (i.e. the stages of development are derived from a common underlying process). Hence in this process, each stage is a precursor to the next stage. Also, the stages of development are based on logic and natural order. Since this theory is cumulative and not interactive, the Life-Cycle theory is one that shares the characteristics of a linear non-dynamic change process. In our organizational change intervention, members described that they had to realize the significance of going through this process as change is an inherent part of the life of the organization. Some expressed that it was like growing up as human beings: as an organization grows, change is part of the growth itself.

Linear Dynamic (Dialectical)

A linear change process where the initial, intermediate states, and end states affect each other are considered dynamic. Usually, this change process would involve multiple variables (more than two). However, the end state can only be predicted and not accurately determined. In a linear dynamical system, numerous variables affect an end state suggesting the notion of equifinality in the system (or process). As numerous variables can affect this system, usually the strongest path to suggest a linear change is used (e.g. critical path analysis, or various other statistical methods). In linear systems (non-dynamic or dynamic) the outcome is predictable and that there is a clear relationship among the factors. Van de Ven and Poole (1995), proposes that the Dialectical Ideal Type of change applies when an entity exists in a pluralistic world of colliding events, forces, or contradictory values that compete with each other for domination and control. Such a process would therefore require at least two opposing forces that may be internal or external to the entity. Also, stability (or balance) is reached when the opposing forces attain some form of equilibrium. The authors, however, do not mention explicitly that this equilibrium state could be temporary and is subject to the sensitivity of new opposing forces. As the main thrust of this theory is the presence and interaction of opposing forces, there are very strong similarities to the linear dynamic change process.

Members of the organization during the retreat described their experience as that of continuously fighting with two entities: the organizational leadership and the customers/clients. The members mention that even a simple change process affects the stakeholders differently. They mentioned that they experienced great difficulty trying to pacify and resolve the various problems hurled at them because of the transitional phase of the change that it can be extremely frustrating. Members suggested that the leaders in the organization send out information regarding this change to all the various stakeholders so as to achieve the smoothest transition through the

change process. Apart from that, some members feel that from an intra-psychic perspective, they have to deal with their own tensions of giving up their spaces and even roles to assume new office spaces and new (more expanded) job descriptions. Some members expressed that the inner tension that the organization is always trying to be better without expending resources to send members for courses that can help themselves as individuals to learn and develop.

Linear Non-Dynamic with weak Chaotic (Teleological)

In non-linear dynamical systems, cause and effect are not proportional: a small effect can have significant consequences, and a major effort can yield very little (Çambel, 1993). Non-linear dynamic change happens when the change process from the initial state through the intermediate state(s) to the end state do not follow a linear process. It therefore becomes increasingly difficult to even predict the end state. Such a process has been termed complex due to its difficulty to predict the end state. However, non-linear dynamic processes have become more and more studied especially with the introduction of chaos theory. However, non-linear dynamic change becomes a chaotic process when the overall dynamic is sensitive to initial conditions and when there is transition from order to chaos. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) suggest that the Teleological Ideal Type of change is a process that centers on a purpose or a goal that is the final cause for guiding movement of an entity. If one were to look at organizational change efforts, one will notice this pattern. However, this process is an adaptive one, suggesting that there is interaction internal and external to the entity. Although this sounds non-linear, it is a linear dynamic process since the development is directional toward a purpose or goal. As the concept of equifinality applies to this type of change, it would still be linear (toward a goal/purpose) and dynamic (some level of interaction). The authors do mention that goals can change and hence the developmental path may vary, but do not suggest a chaotic process

(as they do not suggest that the developmental paths are sensitive to initial conditions).

Feedback from the organizational intervention indicated aspects of Teleological Change as well. Members described their experience as the feeling that although they know the organization has a goal after implementing these changes, some feel that they some of these goals are made explicit whereas others are not. Everyone agreed that all members in the organization should be told of the intent and goals behind this change. Some even expressed smaller sets of action steps that could help them be motivated and move in the direction of the change.

Linear Dynamic, Non-linear dynamic, and tendency toward Chaotic (Evolutionary)

As we have already discussed the Linear Dynamic, Non-linear Dynamic and a briefly covered chaotic in terms of the unpredictability of the end states, we will leave a detailed description of Chaotic Change with respect to the next section that involves change incorporating all four Ideal Type of change. The Evolutionary Ideal Type of Change is a process centered on its nature of being cumulative and proceeding through a cycle of variation, selection, and retention (Van de Ven & Poole, 1995). The authors also mention that variations emerge randomly (or by chance), selection is the competition of scarce resources, and retention involves forces that perpetuate and maintain. They further mention that although Evolutionary Theory is used to explain global changes, it can be used at the micro-level (Weick, 1979; Gersick, 1989). This theory suggests the unpredictability of the outcome but that there are stabilizing forces (retention, and selection to some extent) and destabilizing forces (variations, and possibly selection to some extent) concurrently at play.

In the organizational intervention, members described their experiences as also realizing that their organization does not exist in a vacuum and therefore, the environment is a very strong force to instigate or even force change. Members felt that individually, they should be given opportunities to develop and attend training sessions to better themselves to serve the organization better as it evolves. They expressed that they feel it is necessary to adapt to the environment and that in order to survive and succeed, it would not only be important to change in accordance to the pressures of the environment, but also more importantly, to change as fast as possible without destroying the organization.

Chaotic Processes (all four Ideal Types Present)

There are certain characteristics in a chaotic process. This includes “strange attractors”; “fractals”; “bifurcation”; “transition zones”; and “phase spaces”. “Strange Attractors” is where the heart of chaos is. Chaotic systems are very sensitive to initial conditions causing drastic effects on the system, which is termed as “sensitive dependency to initial conditions” (Gleick, 1987). The patterns in the strange attractors are also fractal. Fractals are structures that are similar on all scales (Parker, 1996). Bifurcation happens when a system changes direction or state (Parker, 1996). Chaologists call these moments of possibility bifurcation points (Briggs, 1992). It is a point in the system where an option exists and a “choice” is made to move in one of two directions or to change from stable to unstable. When there is any change that happens in a system, a transition zone is present. These transition zones or “areas” are the most interesting places, and it is “inside these areas that systems degenerate [or regenerate] and emerge in patterns” (Briggs, 1992). It is the place where a system moves between order and chaos, between simplicity and complexity, and between stability and instability. Both can exist simultaneously and yet transitions from one state to another. Van de Ven and Poole (1995) mention that they found it difficult to find occasions when all four

types of change are present and that the one they found involved human progression (or development). Cunha and Cunha (2003) argue that organizational improvisation fills one of the gaps in Van de Ven and Poole's (1995) taxonomy. Maitlis (2005:21) suggests that sense-making (Weick, 1995) is a process of social construction where "organizational members interpret their environment in and through interactions with others, constructing accounts that allow them to comprehend the world and act collectively."

In our organizational intervention, all members described experiencing all four Ideal Types of change within an organizational change process. In fact, the members mention that these four Types of change processes are experienced almost on a daily basis but can be best described as sometimes orderly and sometimes absolutely chaotic. This description aligns with the notion of "transition zones" in Chaos Theory. In particular, the members mentioned that there is a critical need to have two specific "interaction spaces:" One is for members at their own group/departmental levels, and the other for members representing the different levels of the organization. It is within these two contexts that members can express and deal with their diverse experiences during the change process. They believe that the provision of such a context can deal with the positive and negative experiences that emerge and could be the main contributor to the success or failure of the organizational change effort. This specific request led us to concentrate on the importance of context at both the within-group (departmental) and between-group (organizational) interaction spaces and its relation to positive experiences (when provided with such a space) or negative experiences (when such spaces are either not provided or used only for dissemination). Mowday and Sutton (1993) highlighted the importance of context in the study of organizational behavior and its opportunity creating or behavior constraining characteristics. Agreeing with Pfeffer (1991), Mowday and Sutton mention that an organizational member's "location in the social context influences his/her contacts and experiences within the organization" (1993: 205). The significance

and centrality of a space for members to have conversations about their experience suggest such spaces to be the “transition zones” of the experience of organizational change and success of organizational change. We propose that the experience of organizational change is best studied as transition zones between order and chaos and that alignment of experiences and motivation of organizational members with the goals of the organization is what would make a change effort successful or fail. Table I below shows a summary of the plausible relationships between the general change processes and the four Ideal Types proposed by Van de Ven and Poole (1995).

As mentioned earlier, we believe that organizational change should involve understanding the experience of members in an organization going through the process. In the next section we intend to show how each of these types of change is experienced as described by members in the organizational change intervention we worked with. As the members mention their perceptions, emotions, reactions, and even aspects of attitude change and leadership, we will also attempt to incorporate some human development, perception, leadership and learning theories that exist into the experience of organizational change.

Table 1
Relationships between the Ideal-Types of Change Process (Van de Ven & Poole
(1995) and the General Process of change

IDEAL TYPES OF CHANGE	RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN IDEAL-TYPES AND GENERAL CHANGE PROCESSES	GENERAL CHANGE PROCESSES
<p>Life Cycle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Metaphor of organic growth • Change is imminent • Moderated by immanent logic, rules, or program that go with the entity's development • Unitary sequence, cumulative or conjunctive • Each stage is a precursor to the next stage (stages based on logic and natural order) • Not interactive 	<p>STRONG Linear Non-Dynamic</p>	<p>Linear Non-Dynamic (LND):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An action will cause a directly predictable reaction • Represented by causal models, static models • There is an order present in the process • The end state is a result of cumulative change over time • The next state (stage) can be predicted based on the previous state(s)
<p>Teleological:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adaptive • Interactive • Directed towards a goal • Concept of equifinality applies • There's the possibility that goals can change 	<p>MAINLY Non-Linear Dynamic; WEAK Chaotic</p>	<p>Linear Dynamic (LD):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involves multiple variables • End state can only be predicted and not accurately determined • Numerous variables can affect the end state suggesting equifinality • There could be a strongest path to suggest optimum end state (Critical Path Analysis)
<p>Dialectical:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Competing forces for dominance/control • There has to be at least two opposing forces • Equilibrium occurs when the opposing forces stabilize 	<p>STRONG Linear Dynamic</p>	<p>Non-Linear Dynamic (NLD):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cause and effect are not proportional • The end state does not follow a linear process • It is increasingly difficult to even predict the end state • Sometimes termed as "complex"
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evolutionary: • Change is accumulative • Variation (random) • Selection (competitive) • Retention (forces that perpetuate/maintain) • Variations emerge randomly • Can apply to micro-systems • Outcome is unpredictable • There are stabilizing and destabilizing forces present 	<p>MAINLY Linear Dynamic; SOME Non-Linear Dynamic with a tendency towards chaotic</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chaotic (C): • The dynamic is sensitive to initial conditions • There is constant transition from order and chaos • Fractals are present in the transition zones • The system contains three layers: • Order • Transition Zones • Chaos • The system moves between simplicity and complexity • Both order and chaos co-exist • Exists in a phase space where various states of the system can be mapped

The Experience of Organizational Change

The organizational intervention we were involved in caused us to rethink the experience of organizational change. Organizational change is a very complex phenomenon involving organizational level, departmental, sectional, and individual actions and reactions that are not at all linear in nature. Dewey (1938) highlighted the importance of understanding experience as present or past experiences lead to consequent future experiences. Kolb's (1984) Experiential Learning Theory (ELT) that focuses on the importance of experience had its roots from Dewey (1938) and is one of the most influential theories used in managerial development (Vince, 1998). The theory of Conversational Learning (Baker, Jensen & Kolb, 2002) includes ELT. In alignment with the emergence of the importance of conversations and experience, we identified from our organizational intervention that one of the critical context expressed by members was the need to have a space for interaction and communication (or conversational spaces). The importance of similar interactive spaces is emerging. Organizations should be seen as a plurality of discourses and storied interpretations of interpersonal dynamics (Haddadj, 2003). In studying three orchestras with diverse stakeholders, Maitlis (2005) included observing 107 meetings to develop four forms of sense-making processes based on combinations of high or low levels of sense-giving using characteristics of animation and control and outcomes of accounts and action. What is critical is the fact that they had meetings where issues, views or demands from the diverse stakeholders could be discussed.

The co-existence of forces internal and external to each of these levels shows that the experience of organizational change is indeed a highly complex phenomenon. Table II shows the synopses of the experiences of change across the different levels and the focus on having a space to engage, share and deal with their experiences of the change process.

Table II
The Types of Change and the Expressed Context Need by Organizational Members

Level	Types of Change Experienced	Context Needed and Expressed
Individual	Life-Cycle (intra-psychic process), Dialectical (giving up old roles and spaces to embrace new ones) Lack of Evolutionary Change for self-development (such as training), Teleological (not all goals and objectives are made explicit)	Space to express needs and concerns about job scope, job stability, and future development (felt threats, losing of relationships, friendships, and jobs). Members requested a space to be able to freely express one's interests and needs; be assigned or involved in development programs to try to fit into the group/department; to be able to feel part of the group; engage in giving feedback to leaders; to learn to develop the skills to deal with all these forces; a space or system to bring issues to the management and for the management to share information and work with them as a team; a space where the goals can be disseminated clearly and where management can be also open to adjusting these goals and objectives based on the feedback from individual members; and providing supportive networks in place during the transition.
Group	Dialectical (management and stakeholders), Lifecycle, Teleological (not told intent of the change and would prefer smaller steps that can motivate them toward change)	Forum to express frustrations and seek out solutions for smooth transitions and to break down the process of change into smaller action steps that is both motivational and directional. Such a space can also be used to make the change intents more explicit and to obtain feedback from members with regards to issues that might arise. Groups also wanted a space to be able to not only voice their tensions, concerns, and worries but also to be able to have supportive networks to help deal and resolve such issues. Group members also mentioned that alignment with the organization's goals or objectives should be one that takes into account the necessary dialogue and training because of the expansion of work and roles of the group.
Departmental	Teleological (important to change and adapt to the environment), Dialectical (the pace of change could be detrimental to the organization)	Should have meetings at the departmental level to disseminate objectives and goals of the change more explicitly and also to get feedback from their feedback from top management. Representatives from different groups within the department should meet to discuss and deal with negative experiences or concerns raised by individual groups. Cross-departmental communication was raised as a key process during the transition
Organizational	Evolutionary (towards environment but not towards individual development), Teleological (Strategic goals and objectives should be based on some feedback from within the organization)	Representatives from each department could be present at the organizational level to discuss and deal with issues that percolated upward with regards to the change and to foster double-loop learning in the organization in view of the change process. Top management has to understand what members, groups, and departments are going through.

The Significance of Conversational Spaces as the Critical Context for Change.

Based on our conversations and feedback from the organizational members, an important central need expressed was management creating a space to have conversations with them so that everyone can voice their experience during the change process. This conversational space for organizational members can be created to be a psychologically safe context where management and members can talk about the linear aspects of the change process (i.e. dealing with issues of outcomes and goals); opportunities for members to learn and develop during this process; providing supportive networks at each level and across levels for members; and finally to also provide a space for feedback and reactions to engage in double-loop organizational learning. Bokeno (2003) identifies that Argyris' Organizational Learning involve elements of organizational dynamics that are engaged via human interaction and communication. It is in these conversational contexts that human interaction and communication can happen such that more positive experiences can emerge or be generated. Cox (2004) proposes organizational change as shifting conversations. Zaptin's (2003) review of *Learning to Change: A guide for organization change agents* (Caluwe & Vermaak 2003) highlights the presence of the formal and informal organizations within an organization and that change agents need to use communication and sense making to carry out change. Maitlis (2005) citing Eden (1992) says that the social processes that underpin sense-making at the organizational level remain underexamined. She presents the importance of employee participation in "strategic conversations" with their bosses to influence the ways in which issues are understood or enacted. In her research, she included observing 107 meetings of orchestral members with their diverse stakeholders. We are suggesting the context within which such social processes exist is in the physical and particularly, psychological spaces where human interaction and communication occurs. Watson (2003) mentions the significance of organizational change discourse in the construction of

fairness through the change process. Other researchers suggest similar contexts that are vital to organizations: Ogbonna and Harris (2003) highlighted “groovy community centers;” Kahn’s (2004) suggested the concept of holding environments; and Bryant and Cox (2004) proposed the idea of constructing conversion stories. What we propose in this paper aligns with the emergent trend of focusing on significance of context during organizational change. We simply are adding what we discovered to be a critical component that leads to positive or negative experiences during a change process: the psychological spaces that combine human interaction and communication – what we label conversational spaces. Change agents need to provide such spaces where organizational members can raise, discuss and deal with their experiences with regards to the change process.

It is the context within which such conversations happen that is critical in organizational transitions. Perhaps it would be best to reframe organizational change as “Organizational Transition.” When described as Organizational Transition, the very nature and characteristics of transition zones would apply to show aspects of order and chaos continuously flowing in and out of this “transition zones.” Haddadj (2003) proposes that organizations are chaotic systems but does not present the key initial condition or the transition zones around which change occurs.

We argue that perhaps the one most important aspect central and very much embedded in the transition zone is conversation. We distinguish conversation from communication as the former captures experience whereas communication is used to obtain or disseminate information (see Figure 1). We suggest that conversation is a common denominator – instead of communication or dialogue – which is facilitated by the networks created and maintained in an organization. Conversation (which is the fractal pattern across all levels) involves all cognition, emotion, attitude change, transformation, experience etc., the perception and interpretation of which causes the change

process to move from stabilizing to destabilizing forces and vice versa. Positive experiences promote stabilizing forces in the change process whereas negative experiences destabilize the change process. Managers and leaders of organizations have to realize the significance of their members' experiences of the change process and to create a context to have conversations during the change process –Ideal Conversational Spaces.

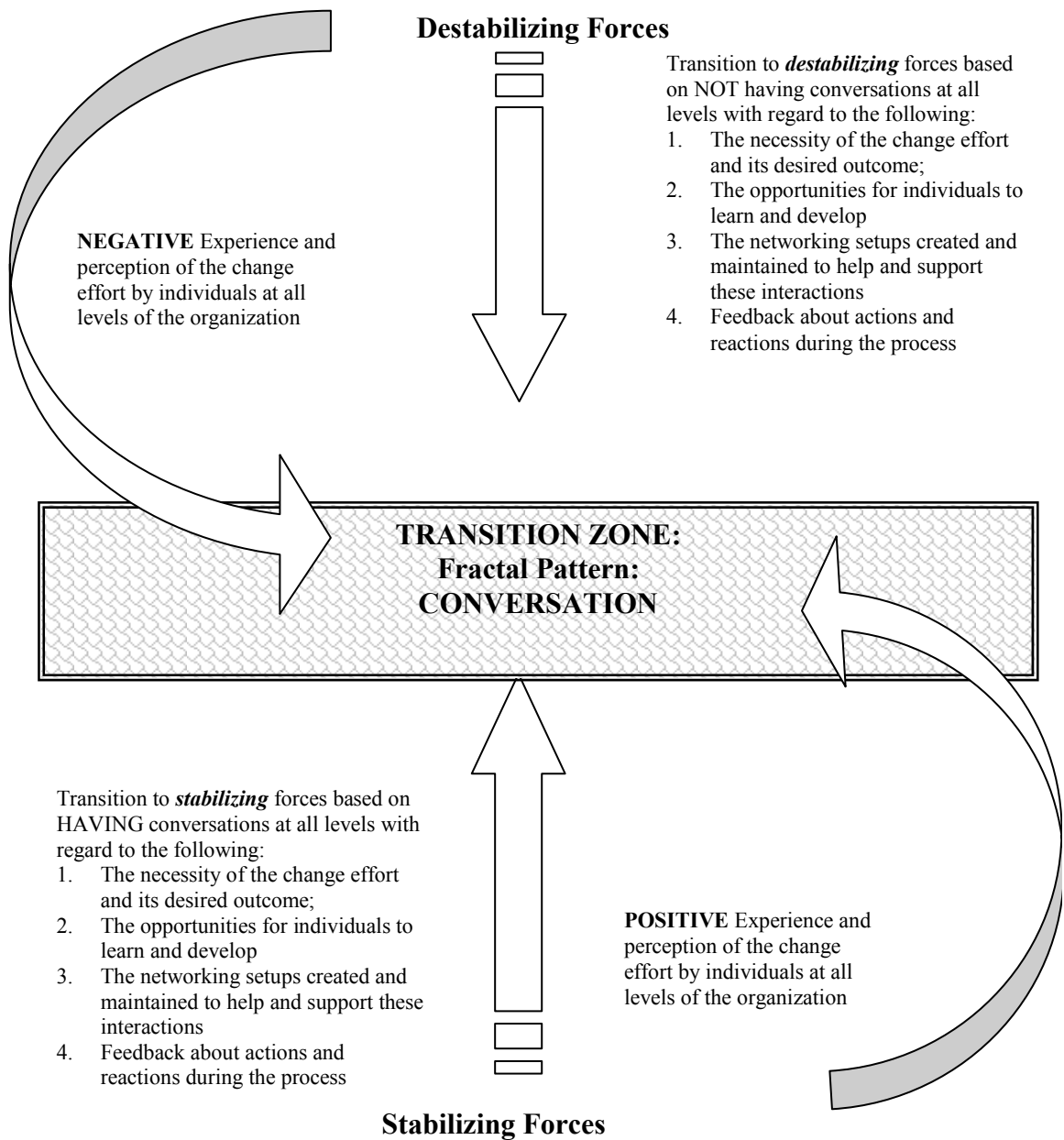


Figure 1. The Experience of Organizational Change

While conversations have been framed as the context within which humans engage in social interaction (Giddens, 1984; Poole & DeSanctis, 1990), organizations themselves have been defined both as conversations (Ford, 1999) and as a network of conversations

(Broekstra, 1998). Numerous researchers have positioned conversations as an important aspect of organizational change efforts (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; Beer, Eisenhart, & Spector, 1990; Ford & Backoff, 1988) and espouse that they have the power to create organizational culture (Ford & Ford, 1995), construct people's realities (Giddens's 1984; Berger & Luckmann, 1966; Whitehead, 1941; Winograd & Flores, 1987; Maturana & Varela, 1987) or to create memes (Dawkins, 1989; Lynch, 1996; Brodie, 1996). Conversations have also been identified as critical to management education (Shaw & Weber, 1991; Ford & Ford, 1995), learning (Newman & Holzman, 1997; Baker, Jensen, & Kolb, 2002) and creating the right context for teams (Lingham, 2004).

Baker, Jensen, and Kolb (2002) propose that Conversational Learning comprise ten dimensions: Apprehension, Comprehension, Intension, Extension, Individuality, Relationality, Status, Solidarity, Discursive and Recursive. A good space is therefore one that would embrace and integrate each dimension providing members the possibility to pursue new understanding through the questioning of existing assumptions and prejudices and generate positive experiences. The Conversational Space Inventory (CoSI) is a 35-item questionnaire that builds on Conversational Learning and measures these 10 dimensions along four specific spaces: A team's Divergent Space measures the non-task related dimensions incorporating the extent of involvement, reflection, individuality, relationality, and solidarity experienced; a team's Convergent Space measures the task related dimensions and captures the extent to which the team experiences task related analysis, action, and adherence to an agenda (or linear time constraints); a team's Status Space measures its dependence on a strong leader; and finally a team's Recursive Space measures the interest-driven aspects of the interaction and captures the extent that team members can raise issues or concerns that may divert the team from its task related activities. (For details of the items and statistical analyses see Lingham (2004).)

This instrument, the Conversational Space Inventory (or CoSI) was administered to the two teams in the organization that were working with regards to the organizational change process. We also (at the request of the leader of the organization) administered to the representatives across the levels of the department that met on a monthly basis to discuss issues related to the change effort. Based on the findings from previous research using the CoSI, there were no problems with regards to method variances and all constructs were proven to be group level constructs (for a detailed analysis of all these criteria see Lingham (2004). As we discovered from the organizational members that such spaces are critical to positive experiences during the organizational change process, we included some tested and validated measures related to Performance (Druskat & Kayes, 2000); Member Satisfaction (Oetzel, 2001); and Psychological Safety (Edmondson, 1999) as a basis to determine if the similarities between the Real and Ideal spaces directly corresponded with high ratings on these three aspects and if dissimilarities between the Real and Ideal spaces corresponded to lower ratings of these variables. All three groups filled out both their Real and Ideal Conversational Spaces based on their experiences in the team and rated their satisfaction, psychological safety and performance of their groups. The mapping and ratings on Satisfaction (low “1” to high “5”); psychological safety and performance (low “1” to high “7”) are shown in Figure 2.

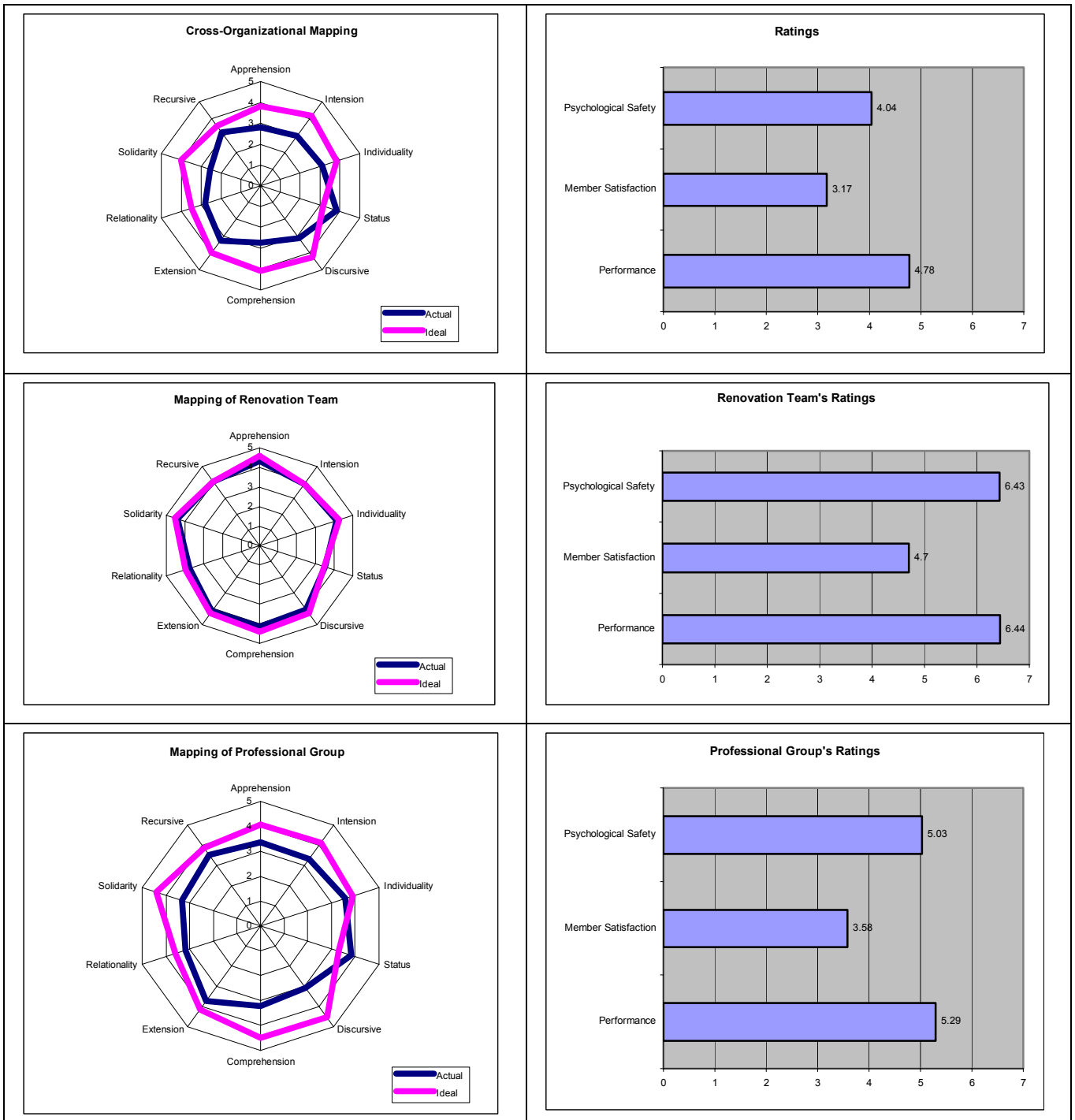


Figure 2. Mappings of Conversational Spaces for the three groups and their corresponding ratings on Psychological Safety, Member Satisfaction and Performance.

As can be seen, when the Real (experienced) spaces are closely matched with the Ideal spaces, members in the group rate their performance, satisfaction and psychological safety higher (refer to the mapping and ratings of the Renovation Team) than when the Real and Ideal spaces are very different (refer to the cross-organizational and professional groups mappings and ratings). This finding confirms the importance of creating appropriate conversational spaces that will generate positive experiences during an organizational change process.

The significance of conversation in organizational life is definitely emerging. In organizations, this is where the life resides. Yet, based on the organizational intervention, members expressed that the one thing the organization can do to help them is to have conversations with them about the change process so that they can feel part of the change. Needless to say, although leaders, managers, employees, customers, and stakeholders are continually interacting or conversing, whether or not the conversations are meaningful or effective is critical to individual, group, and organizational learning and performance and particularly so during the transitional period of organizational change.

Conclusion

As discovered in the intervention process, the experience of organizational change is a chaotic one involving all four Ideal Types of Change (Ven de Van & Poole, 1995) as their experiences are different at various levels of the organization. Being such a complex phenomenon, it is critical for managers and leaders to create a safe conversational space for organizational members at all levels to have interactions and feedback around: 1. the necessity of the change and the desired outcomes; 2. opportunities for members to learn and develop; 3. the supportive network created through this process and; 4. the openness to obtain feedback and suggestions from members were critical to successful organizational change. In this paper the common

need expressed is to have a space for such conversations. We used the CoSI to map out these conversational spaces for the three groups that requested the mapping. We present that each group's mapping was unique in both the Real and Ideal spaces and that such information is vital to create the right and healthy context specific groups or teams need during times of organizational transition. We further propose that such spaces be part of organizational life due to the ever-changing nature of the process of organizing in today's work environment. We also show that such spaces should have the appropriate Divergent, Convergent, status, and Recursive Spaces to promote and nurture positive experiences during organizational transitions. Therefore, when members experience the change process as a positive one (through the conversations across all levels) the more accepting of the change they will be, which inevitably moves toward stabilizing the change process and experiencing it as less chaotic. In the reverse situation, when members across all levels are unhappy with the experience, the process becomes less stabilizing and more chaotic, resulting in the holistic experience as problematic, which ultimately causes members to be resistant to the change process. Finally, organizational change agents, leaders, managers, and members should co-create the appropriate spaces for members across all levels and within levels to engage in human interaction and communication that is as close as possible to the Ideal spaces needed to ensure and support smooth organizational transition.

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