

Transformative Learning as a Condition for Transformational Change in Organizations

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Current organizational change literature points to the continuing high rate of failure for transformational change efforts in organizations. Mergers, acquisitions, global competition, and new technology are driving forces that demand rapid transformational changes if organizations are to survive in an environment of discontinuous change. Therefore, management, scholars, and consultants continue to seek a more effective approach to transforming organizations. This article presents a comparison of prominent change theories that have been proposed in the disciplines of organizational development, organizational learning, adult learning, and psychological development. The theories have been categorized into two groups: transformative learning, which focuses on change on the individual level, and transformational change, which focuses on organizational change. This article proposes that these two schools of thought, although different in their approach to change, are complementary and provide insights for developing a more effective approach to transformational change in organizations.

Transformational change in organizations involves radical changes in how members perceive, think, and behave at work (Cummings & Worley, 1997). Current organizational change literature points to the continuing high rate of failure for transformational change efforts in large organizations (Beer & Nohria, 2000; Cameron & Quinn, 1999; Nevis, Lancourt, & Vassalo, 1996; Robbins & Finley, 1996; Walton, 1999). At the same time, pressure for organizations to change intensifies. Mergers, acquisitions, global competition, and technology are driving forces that demand rapid adjustments in the form of innovative organizational designs, new work processes, and new knowledge creation. Vaill (1996) coined the term “permanent white water” to characterize the environment in which today’s organizations must operate.

Another term that has become popular in describing today’s environment of change is “discontinuous change.” Nadler (1998) provided one of the most comprehensive definitions of discontinuous change. He described discontinuous change as shattering existing organizational frameworks and

Human Resource Development Review Vol. 1, No. 2 June 2002 186-214
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scrambling internal patterns of relationships. He also suggested some key characteristics that distinguish discontinuous change: (a) the *magnitude of change*, a jolting departure from the natural order of things; (b) *multiple and concurrent changes*, radical change that involves a barrage of changes occurring simultaneously; (c) *incomplete transitions*, changes that are initiated and then dropped; and (d) *time span*, successful discontinuous change efforts that can take 3 to 5 years. With little hope of calmer waters in the foreseeable future, management, scholars, and consultants continue to seek a more effective approach to transforming organizations in an environment of discontinuous change.

Organizational change is by no means a new science. Kurt Lewin's (1951) work and research in the dynamics of change is most notable with scholars of organizational change continuing to use the change process he identified as "*unfreezing—moving—refreezing*" as the basis for their own models and theories of organizational change. But despite the work of numerous scholars and consultants, who in the past five decades have pursued an effective change methodology, results continue to be disappointing. Why, after five decades of continuous study and so many proposed theories of organizational change, have we made only moderate progress in effectively executing change? Is it flawed theory, failure to execute effectively in practice, or both? It is beyond the scope of this article to analyze execution, but a review of change theory can provide a comparative analysis of past and current thought on the process of change.

The intent of this article is to compare prominent theories of change that have been proposed in the four arenas of organizational development, organizational learning, adult learning, and psychological development. The theorists and their theories discussed in this article were selected because of their prominence in organizational change literature and transformative learning literature. The group selected is not intended to be totally comprehensive but rather a representative selection of the different perspectives on change at both the individual and organizational levels. The theories have been grouped into two categories: *transformative learning*, which focuses on how individuals change their perspectives, primarily through the process of critical reflection, and *transformational change*, which has organizational change as its primary focus.

These two schools of thought have different origins and for the most part have evolved separately. Transformative learning theory has its roots in adult learning theory, thus its focus on the cognitive learning processes of the adult individual. Transformational change theory, on the other hand, finds its origins in the social sciences, which examine the effect of social influences that are external to people. It is the premise of this article that both perspectives can contribute to a more holistic and effective approach to change in organizations.

In some instances, a theorist is identified as being in both categories when their theory of change satisfies the criteria for both categories. It is important to state here that this article is not suggesting that the theorists placed in the transformational change category fail to consider or address the importance of change at the individual level; it simply means that the transformational change theorists do not attempt to describe the internal change process individuals go through to adjust to and accept organizational change. Rather, they suggest ways to create an environment that is conducive to change to address symptoms of resistance at the individual level, such as negative attitudes and lack of commitment.

An environment that is conducive to change is an important aspect of managing change, but as this article suggests, it may not be sufficient to bring about transformational change in an organization. An analogy that may be helpful in making this distinction would be a mother who treats the symptoms of a child's illness, such as a fever, with cold compresses and liquids as compared to a doctor whose understanding of the inner working of the human body can more successfully diagnose the root causes of the illness and intervene with medications and therapies that address the root causes. Both the mother and the doctor contribute to the child's return to health, but the doctor's treatment is more likely to facilitate a faster and more complete recovery. Bridges (1991) articulated this distinction between the external and internal aspects of change well:

It isn't the changes that do you in; it's the transitions. Change is not the same as transition. *Change* is situational: the new site, the new boss, the new team roles, the new policy. Transition is the psychological process people go through to come to terms with the new situation. Change is external; transition is internal. (p. 3)

The articulation of this internal process of change, which Bridges referred to as "transition," is what distinguishes the transformative learning theories from the transformational change theories discussed in this article. The article will show how these schools of thought, although different, are complementary and how transformative learning theory provides insights for developing a more effective approach to transformational change in organizations.

This article begins with an overview of both transformational change theory and transformative learning theory. The overview is essential, not only to understanding how they differ, but also to see how they may complement each other. Then, the selected theories will be compared and contrasted. Insights provided by this comparison suggest a relationship between individual transformative learning and transformational change in organizations. Most of the theorists reviewed in this article do not discuss this relationship, but those who do provide the basis for a more comprehensive and effective approach to organizational change. This comparison will be followed by a review of some qualitative research in transformative learning, which suggests that the relationship does exist and should be considered by

all organizational change theorists. The article concludes with a brief discussion of the implications of HRD's role in organizational change and recommendations for future research.

Transformational Change in Organizations

What is transformational change? Walton (1999) helped to answer this question by distinguishing between *transactional* change and *transformational* change in organizations. Transactional change refers to the modification and redesign of the systems and processes in which individuals interact. Transformational change, on the other hand, refers to changing the way people in the organization perceive their roles, responsibilities, and relationships. Fundamental changes in perception lead to changes in behavior within the organization. Burke (1992) made a similar distinction; he referred to the transactional level of human behaviors, which involves everyday interactions and exchanges, and the process of human transformation, which involves sudden "leaps" in behavior. This distinction between the two types/levels of change is relevant in that both types involve different approaches, with transformational change being far more complex and challenging.

Transformational change requires altering the basic elements of an organization's culture. These include the norms, values, and assumptions under which the organization functions (Burke, 1992; Cummings & Worley, 1997; French & Bell, 1999; Nevis et al., 1996; Walton, 1999). Cummings and Worley (1997) explained that organizational transformation involves radical changes in the way people perceive, think, and behave at work. Organizational transformation involves reshaping the culture and design elements of the organization; it goes well beyond just "making the organization better or fine tuning the status quo" (p. 476). Rather, it entails the fundamental change of the character and culture of the organization.

The organizational change theorists in the transformational change category whose work is reviewed in this article have differing and distinctive perspectives on organizational change processes. A brief synopsis of each theorist's approach highlights how the theorist conceptualizes change both at the individual level and the organizational level. Table 1 presents elements of the theorists' prescribed processes for enabling organizational change; it also includes the characteristics ascribed to both the transformed organization and the individuals within it. You will note that where a theorist does not address a particular aspect of change listed in the table, the cell is left empty with a notation "Does not address."

Kurt Lewin. Lewin's original research in the 1940s and 1950s led to his well-known model of organizational change of "unfreezing-moving-refreezing"

(text continues on p. 198)

TABLE 1: Comparison of Transformative Learning Theory and Transformational Change Theory

<i>Theorist/Author</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Key Terms/ Concepts</i>	<i>Process for Organizational Transformation</i>	<i>Characteristics of Transformed Organization</i>	<i>Process for Individual Transformation</i>	<i>Characteristics of Transformed Individual</i>
Kurt Lewin (as elaborated on by Edgar Schein)	Transformational change	Unfreezing and freezing Environmental forces (force-field analysis) Organization as social system	Unfreeze current level of behavior Movement to change the social system Refreezing to establish behavior that is secure against change	Changes are embraced and integrated Improved organizational efficiency and effectiveness	Disconfirmation creates motivation for change Cognitive restructuring of perspectives Integration of new perspectives into self-concept and relationships	Individuals identify with new role models who reflect the new point of view New point of view is integrated into the personality and self-concept Integrates new point of view into key relationships
Lippitt, Watson, and Westley	Transformational change	Phases of change Change agent Institutionalizing the change Development of internal change management expertise	Development of the need for change Establishment of a change relationship Working toward change Generalization and stabilization of change Achieving a terminal relationship	Normative support for the change Structural support for the change Organizational commitment Internal expertise to sustain the changes	Does not address	New patterns of behavior Stable, secure New skills Acceptance of change

Burke and Litwin	Transformational change	Transformational and transactional dynamics Organizational climate Systems view	Assess level of change required Redefine mission and strategy Leadership commitment Communication Training Integration	Organizational commitment Disengagement from the past Reemergence of pride Stability	Does not address	Understanding and belief in the new mission Acceptance of new expectations Motivated Committed Improved performance Focus on customer
Nevis, Lancourt, and Vassalo	Transformational change	Resocialization Paradigm shifts Organizational realities Discontinuous thinking	Persuasive communication Participation Create expectancy Role modeling Extrinsic rewards Structural change Coercion	Capacity for continuous change Integration of new behaviors Flexibility Shared understandings and meanings New structure	Does not address	Approval/acceptance of changes New behaviors New mental models Disengagement with past Innovation and experimentation Learning orientation New skills Energy and initiative to pursue vision

(continued)

TABLE I Continued

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Daryl Conner	Transformational change	Resilience Future shock Dysfunctional behavior Control Burning platform	Establish change roles Communicate and sell change Build commitment Cultivate a new culture Manage the culture Develop synergy	Capacity for change Resilient Synergistic relationships Culture consistent with vision	Does not address	Resilient Sense of urgency Commitment Involved in synergistic relationships Positive Focused
John P. Kotter	Transformational change	Guiding coalitions Vision and strategy Anchoring new approaches in the culture Short-term wins	Establish sense of urgency Create a guiding coalition Develop vision and strategy Communicate change vision Empower broad-based action Generate short-term wins Consolidate gains and produce more change Anchor new approaches in the culture	Less bureaucracy Flatter organization Customer focused Externally oriented Empowered employees Decisions made quickly Open and candid interaction Risk taking Information shared openly	Does not address	Commitment New skills Customer focused Quality versus quantity

Beckhard and Pritchard	Transformational change	Systems thinking Fundamental change Vision-driven change Resistance formula Lewin's unfreeze-movement-refreeze	Diagnosis Create vision Create new structures and processes Move to learning mode Reward learning and commitment Build commitment through education, role modeling, and rewards	Sensitivity to environment Management toward vision Knowledge sharing Open communication Commitment to learning Alignment between organizational goals and capacity to perform	Does not address	Commitment New skills
David A. Nadler	Transformational change	Systems thinking Discontinuous change Integrated change Congruence model	Recognizing the change imperative Developing a shared direction Implementing change Consolidating change Sustaining change	Congruence of internal components: work processes, people, formal organization, and informal organization Improved performance Open communications	Does not address	Individual's skills, values, and beliefs are congruent with the organization's

(continued)

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Chris Argyris	Transformational change and transformative learning	Organizational learning Theories-in-use Theories of action Single- and double-loop learning	Individuals become aware of theories-in-use and automatic reasoning processes Realization of how learning systems sanction theories-in-use Individuals learn a new theory of action Introduce new actions into the organization	Double-loop learning as opposed to single-loop learning Valid information is openly shared Collective internal commitment High freedom of choice Risk taking Frequent testing of theories and processes publicly	The individual becomes aware of theories-in-use and automatic reasoning processes The realization of how learning systems sanction the theories-in-use occurs A new theory of action is developed and implemented	Commitment Trust Individuality
Paulo Freire	Transformative learning	Pedagogy of the oppressed Conscientization Critical reflection Liberation Emancipation Social action	Does not address	Democratic Humanistic	Critical reflection on one's own assumptions, biases, beliefs, and values Testing of new understandings and new meanings through discourse with others Action	Self-awareness Empowered, self-directing Liberated, emancipated

Jack Mezirow	Transformative learning	Adult learning Meaning perspectives Meaning schemes Critical reflection	Acknowledgement of oppression in the organization Critical reflection on personal experience by individuals Legitimization of personal knowledge Reflection on and critique of power mechanisms in the organization Planned change Action/implementation	More openness and honesty within the organization More effective implementation of change initiatives Learning orientation	Self-examination triggered by a disorienting event Critical assessment of assumptions Recognition that others have negotiated a similar change Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions Planning a new course of action Acquisition of required knowledge and skills Provisional trying of new roles Building of competence and self-confidence Integration of new perspective	Seeks a wider variety of sources of knowledge Tests boundaries and assumptions Sees others as resources rather than authorities Participates in validating changed perspectives Supportive of change
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TABLE I Continued

<i>Theorist/Author</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Key Terms/ Concepts</i>	<i>Process for Organizational Transformation</i>	<i>Characteristics of Transformed Organization</i>	<i>Process for Individual Transformation</i>	<i>Characteristics of Transformed Individual</i>
Robert Kegan	Transformative learning	Authority over information Subject-object psychology Hidden curriculum Orders of consciousness	Does not address	Does not address	Exercise critical thinking Examine one's environment Develop own vision and use it to guide work Take responsibility for one's situation Master work roles Conceive of organization from the outside in—as a whole Develop broader perspec- tives through learning	Loyalty to self Ownership of one's work Self-initiating Self-directing Self-evaluating Responsible

William Bridges	Transformational change and transformative learning	Change as external, transition as internal Transition must occur for change to work Change process begins with endings and ends with beginnings Three-phase process of change: ending, neutral zone, new beginning	Identify who is losing what Acknowledge losses openly and sympathetically Define what is over and what is not Give people information Mark endings Normalize the neutral zone Create temporary systems Use neutral zone creatively Clarify and communicate purpose Create the transition plan Reinforce the new beginning	People have shaped new identities in the context of the organization People are engaged in the change process People feel they are better off for having gone through the change Change is accepted as the norm	Determine what is changing for you Define what is ending Identify your continuities Recognize and acknowledge the symptoms of the neutral zone Take time to reflect on personal priorities Evaluate yourself creatively Consider your possibilities Make a plan to change	Commitment Focus and direction Inner realignment Renewed energy Motivated Future orientation
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(Lewin, 1951). Lewin's theory of change proposed that a systems level of behavior at any point in time was the outcome of two opposing sets of forces—those pushing for change and those resisting change (Cummings & Worley, 1997). Lewin also distinguished between the two types of forces acting on individuals, that is, the “imposed” or external forces and a person's “own” or internal forces (Burke, 1992). Edgar Schein (1992) later elaborated on Lewin's model by adding psychological mechanisms to each of the stages (French & Bell, 1999). Schein also believed that these stages cannot be self-managed and, consequently, require the intervention of a change agent (Walton, 1999).

Lippitt, Watson, and Westley. The Lippitt, Watson, and Westley (1958) model expanded on Lewin's (1951) three stages and was developed from the perspective of an external change agent. The model presents seven phases of change (see Table 1) through which the change agent leads an organization (French & Bell, 1999). Ultimate success in this approach hinges on the change agent transferring responsibility for institutionalizing the change to the client organization. Commitment to change is fostered by involvement in the change process as well as by new reporting and accountability arrangements that provide structural support (Burke, 1992).

Burke and Litwin. The Burke-Litwin model is among the most complex change models. It introduces the concept of organizational climate as distinguished from organizational culture and presents transactional factors associated with climate change and transformation factors associated with culture change. The basic premise of the Burke-Litwin model is that organizational development interventions directed toward structure, management practices, and systems (policies and procedures) result in first-order or transactional change, whereas interventions directed toward mission and strategy, leadership, and organization culture result in second-order or transformational change (French & Bell, 1999).

Nevis, Lancourt, and Vassalo. Nevis et al. (1996) proposed that the key to transformational change in organizations is the creation of a new organizational reality that requires a resocialization process addressing the underlying mental models, meanings, and consciousness of the people within the organization. The process of resocialization they presented is composed of seven elements (see Table 1). The authors framed this process in the context of four phases of transformational change: traditional, exploratory, generative, and internalization. Nevis et al. presented these phases as being cyclical and nonlinear in nature and enabling an organization to continually learn and adapt in an environment of discontinuous change.

Daryl Conner. Conner (1992) discussed organizational change from the perspective of managing change efforts effectively. He focused on the characteristics and capabilities of organizations and individuals that are essential to successful change initiatives. Among these critical qualities is resilience, or the

personal energy on which people draw to adapt and adjust to change. Conner sought to identify and enhance resilience in the organization, thereby increasing its capacity for continual change.

John P. Kotter. Kotter (1996) based his process for organizational change on his analysis of dozens of change initiatives in organizations over a 15-year period. He attributed the failure of change efforts to inwardly focused cultures, paralyzing bureaucracy, parochial politics, a low level of trust, lack of teamwork, arrogant attitudes, lack of leadership, and fear of the unknown. He presented an eight-stage process (see Table 1) to address each of these barriers to transformational change. The first four phases of the process are designed to “defrost” the status quo. Phases five through seven introduce the desired changes, and the last phase anchors the changes in the organization’s culture. Like Conner (1992), Kotter focused on the change process from the perspective of leading and managing change.

Beckhard and Pritchard. Beckhard and Pritchard (1992) stated that change must be fundamental as opposed to incremental. Fundamental change focuses on five “genesis” themes: (a) mission or purpose, (b) identity, (c) relationships with key constituencies, (d) ways of work, and (e) culture. An essential element of the change process is organizational learning, which Beckhard and Pritchard framed in Lewin’s (1951) unfreeze-move-refreeze terms. They also stated that organizational change must be vision driven and that systems thinking should be employed in developing the organization’s mission.

David A. Nadler. Nadler (1998) presented a concept of organizational change called “integrated change,” which involves four interrelated components of the organization’s social system: work, people, the formal organization, and the informal organization. Nadler stated that each component must become congruent with a new strategy if the strategy is to succeed. As in systems theory, each component influences and is influenced by the others. These components form the elements of Nadler’s congruence model, which he placed in the context of a systems model of an organization.

David L. Cooperrider. Cooperrider is the primary developer of an approach to organizational change that he called “appreciative inquiry.” He describes it as “a co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the relevant world around them” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000, p. 5). Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) presented appreciative inquiry as a departure from the traditional problem-solving orientation to organizational change. Based on action research and a constructionist perspective of organizations, appreciative inquiry is a process that involves appreciating and valuing the best of what exists in the organization, envisioning what could be, dialoguing about and constructing what can be, and sustaining the new organization. This appreciative and positive approach to organizational change is also based on Cooperrider’s “heliotropic hypothesis,” which proposed that “social systems evolve toward the most posi-

tive images they hold of themselves" (Bushe, 2000, p. 102). Therefore, the process of appreciative inquiry enables the organization to construct a new and affirmative image of itself.

Summary of Transformational Change in Organizations

This review of organizational change theorists provides evidence of the diversity of perspectives on organizational change. Lewin (1951), Schein (1992), Beckhard and Pritchard (1992), and Nadler (1998) all framed organizational change in the context of the organization as a system. Burke and Litwin (Burke, 1992) shared the systems perspective and also distinguished levels of change (transactional and transformational) in their model of organizational change. Cooperrider (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2000) focused on relationships within the organization. Conner (1992) and Kotter (1996) focused on organizational change from a leadership and management perspective, whereas Lippitt et al. (1958) developed their approach from the perspective of an external change agent. However, two common threads run through all these approaches. First, theorists in this group target the organizational level with their change processes. Except for Lewin and Schein, the theorists assume that changing an organization will result in change in its individual members. Burke (1992) commented:

The target for change is the organization - total system, not necessarily individual members. Individual change is typically a consequence of system change. When a norm, a dimension of the organization's culture, is changed, individual behavior is modified by the new conforming pattern. (p. 12)

Second, the theorists all offer descriptive characteristics of both the transformed organization and its individual members, but the process for individual change is not elaborated on, and this becomes an important point of contrast in the next section.

Transformative Learning in Individuals

Transformative learning is the process of examining, questioning, validating, and revising our perceptions of the world (Cranton, 1994). It is a theory about change, fundamental and sometimes dramatic change, in how we see ourselves and the world around us (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). People who have experienced transformative learning are conscious of doing so; others can also recognize it. For example, a racially prejudiced person who, through transformative learning, comes to value and respect those of different races not only perceives this fundamental change of perspective but is perceived to have undergone a fundamental change by others.

Mezirow and Freire. Although Jack Mezirow and Paulo Freire did not collaborate on the development of transformative learning theory, they will be discussed together because of Freire's strong influence on Mezirow's work. Mezirow is acknowledged as the primary developer of transformative learning theory over the past two decades. In his definitive work, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (1991), Mezirow acknowledged Freire as one of the primary influences on his development of transformative learning theory. He credited Freire's concept of "conscientization" in the adult learning process as the "disorienting dilemma" that brought about Mezirow's own transformational learning experience and his realization that this was a critical dimension lacking in his own work. Both educator and writer, Freire is best known for his work on adult literacy in South America and his focus on the sociocultural reality that affects a learner's life (see Freire, 1993; Freire & Macedo, 1998). Freire's philosophy also embraced adult learning as a transformative process. It is his focus on the social change that distinguishes his views on transformative learning from those of Mezirow, who focuses more on the individual.

Transformative learning has its roots in constructivist learning theory, which maintains that "learning is a process of constructing meaning; it is how people make sense of their experience" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p. 261). What happens to people is seen as less important than how they interpret and explain what happens; this interpretation and explanation determine their actions, their emotional well-being, and their performance (Mezirow, 1991).

Philip Candy (1989, p. 98) laid out more specifically the assumptions of constructivist theory:

1. People participate in the construction of reality.
2. Construction occurs within a context that influences people.
3. Construction is a constant activity that focuses on change and novelty rather than fixed conditions.
4. Commonly accepted categories or understandings are socially constructed, not derived from observation.
5. Given forms of understanding depend on the vicissitudes of social processes, not on the empirical validity of the perspective.
6. Forms of negotiated understanding are integrally connected with other human activities.
7. Focus of control resides within the subjects themselves, and complex behavior is constructed purposefully.
8. Human beings can attend to complex communications and organize complexity rapidly.
9. Human interactions are based on intricate social roles; the rules governing these interactions are often implicit.

In relating these assumptions to transformative learning, Mezirow (1991) explained that both the constructivist and the transformative learning perspectives share the view that meaning exists within the person rather than in external

forms, such as books. These personal meanings are a product of personal experience and are validated through human interaction. This, then, suggests that a person's understanding of the world is entirely a function of past personal experiences.

Cranton (1994) explained that people interpret these experiences in their own way; how they see the world is a result of their perceptions of their experiences. Their experiences are filtered through what Mezirow (1991) called *meaning perspectives*, which are "sets of habitual expectations." These meaning perspectives provide a frame of reference for interpreting experiences; people expect to see things in a certain way because of their past experiences. Cranton also stated that most people have never critically examined their meaning perspectives. Because these perspectives are a product of what they have learned and how they see themselves, perspectives can easily be distorted and can limit a learner's openness to change, growth, and personal development. Therefore, critical reflection on these perspectives and their underlying assumptions is essential to transformational learning.

Mezirow (1991) said that critical reflection is the key concept in transformational learning. Critical reflection enables learners to correct distortions in beliefs and errors in problem solving; it involves the examination and critique of the assumptions on which those beliefs are built. Mezirow distinguished three types of reflection: (a) *content reflection*, which is an examination of the content or description of a problem; (b) *process reflection*, which involves checking on the problem-solving strategies being used; and (c) *premise reflection*, which takes place when the problem itself is questioned.

Premise reflection leads an individual to examine meaning perspectives and perhaps to transform them. Mezirow (1991, p. 111) wrote the following:

Content and process reflection are the dynamics by which our beliefs (meaning schemes) are changed, that is, become reinforced, elaborated, created, negated, confirmed or identified as problems. . . . Premise reflection is the dynamic by which our belief systems (meaning perspectives) become transformed.

Meaning perspectives, which determine what, how, and why people learn, can be transformed through critical reflection, and reflection on one's own premises can lead to transformative learning (Mezirow & Associates, 1990).

Cranton (1994) pointed out that Stephen Brookfield's conceptualization of critical thinking is analogous to Mezirow's description of transformative learning. Brookfield (1987) included four elements in critical thinking: identifying and challenging assumptions, challenging the importance of the context that has influenced our assumptions, imagining and exploring alternatives, and exhibiting reflective skepticism. He described the following phases of critical thinking (p. 13):

1. the occurrence of a trigger event that prompts inner discomfort and perplexity,
2. an appraisal of oneself or self-scrutiny,
3. an exploration of ways to either explain discrepancies or to live with them,
4. the development of alternative perspectives or new ways of thinking and acting,
and
5. the integration of new perspectives into one's life.

A review of the works of Mezirow, Brookfield, and Freire shows that four phases in transformational learning are common to all three:

1. Some disruptive event occurs in the learner's life that challenges his or her view of the world.
2. The learner then critically reflects on beliefs, assumptions, and values that shape the current perspective.
3. The learner develops a new perspective to deal with the discrepancies surfaced by the triggering event.
4. The learner integrates the new perspective into his or her life.

The distinguishing feature of transformative learning is that it involves critical reflection. The learner must reflect on the very assumptions that support his or her beliefs about and perspectives of the world. This reflection leads to a fundamental change in the learner's mental models, which is then integrated into his or her life, producing change that is not only recognized by the learner but also by those with whom the learner interacts as well as those they interact with in their daily lives.

Robert Kegan. Robert Kegan (1982, 1994), whose work in developmental psychology is based on the early work of Jean Piaget, also addressed transformational change in individuals. Kegan examined the interaction between developing consciousness and the influences of culture. He presented a model of psychological development that incorporates five "orders of consciousness"; these represent the increasing levels of a person's capacity to order the complexities of their experience. Kegan (2000) spoke to the link between transformative learning and adult psychological development:

Much of the literature on transformational learning really constitutes an exploration of what constructive-developmental theory and research identifies as but one of several gradual, epochal transformations in knowing of which persons are shown to be capable of throughout life. (p. 59)

Years earlier, Mezirow (1994) had recognized the same relationship and stated, "In my view, the developmental process in adulthood centrally involves the process of transforming meaning structures. I see no good reason to differentiate between transformative learning and adult development" (p. 228).

Chris Argyris. Chris Argyris is categorized under both transformative learning and transformational change because he proposed that all learning and change in an organizational context is initiated at the individual level and then

spreads to the organizational level (Argyris, 1999). Argyris and Schon (1996) described the process of organizational change and learning:

Organizational learning occurs when individuals within an organization experience a problematic situation and inquire into it on the organization's behalf. They experience a surprising mismatch between the expected and actual results of action and respond to that mismatch through a process of thought and further action that leads them to modify their images of organizational phenomena and to restructure their activities so as to bring outcomes and expectations into line, thereby changing organizational theory-in-use. (p. 16)

The "theory-in-use" refers to master programs, so to speak, that both individuals and organizations use to carry out actions. According to Argyris, theories of action can be either "espoused theories" or actual theories, called *theories-in-use*. These theories of action can exist at both the individual and organizational levels. Discrepancies between espoused theories of action and theories-in-use result in inconsistent behavior and can block organizational change and learning. What Argyris called "double-loop learning" is necessary to examine and challenge theories-in-use. This involves critically reflecting on the values, assumptions, and strategies that constitute the theory-in-use. Mezirow and Associates (2000) said that double-loop learning is analogous to the subjective reframing in transformative learning, which involves critical self-reflection of one's own assumptions.

William Bridges. Bridges, like Argyris, is categorized under both transformative learning and transformational change. Bridges's (1980, 1991) novel perspective envisioned the change process beginning with endings and ending with beginnings. His model consists of three phases, the first being the "ending" phase in which the individual acknowledges what has been lost. The second phase is called the "neutral zone." This phase represents the heart of the transition process where "the old habits that are no longer adaptive to the situation are extinguished and new, better-adapted patterns of habit begin to take shape" (1991, p. 6). The final phase is the "new beginning" in which the individual commits to the new way of the life. Bridges's perspective on personal change resembles that of both Mezirow and Kegan in that it is based on personal development theory, which "views transition as the natural process of disorientation and reorientation that marks the turning points of the path of growth" (1980, p. 5). Bridges (1991) described change as external and situational, whereas transition is the internal psychological process through which people come to terms with change.

Bridges (1991) spoke of his gradual change of focus from change at a personal level to including change at an organizational level. The increasing prevalence of organizational changes such as mergers, reorganizations, layoffs, and strategy shifts prompted him to also address change at the organi-

zational level. In his book, *Managing Transitions, Making the Most of Change* (1991), Bridges incorporated a process for managing change at the organizational level as well as at the individual level.

Reg Revans. Revans, along with Argyris and Bridges, is categorized under both transformational change and transformative learning. Revans is generally considered to be the father of “action learning.” In simple terms, action learning is about learning by doing. Revans (1982) defined action learning as “a means of development, intellectual, emotional or physical, that requires its subjects, through responsible involvement in some real, complex and stressful problem, to achieve intended change to improve his observable behavior henceforth in the problem field” (pp. 626-627). Revans initially conceptualized action learning in the context of management development. Action learning has since continued to evolve, and O’Neil (cited in Yorks, O’Neil, & Marsick, 1999) has identified four schools of action learning with distinguishing variations in practice: the scientific school, the tacit school, the experiential school, and the critical reflection school. In its most general form, action learning involves a small group of people working together to solve real problems and at the same time focusing on what and how they are learning. The process involves asking questions about existing knowledge and reflecting on actions taken during and after problem-solving sessions (Marquardt, 1999).

Summary of Transformative Learning in Individuals

All the transformative learning theorists reviewed share three common factors. First, they see critical reflection as essential to the transformative process because it allows a person to alter perspectives and be open to change and personal growth. Second, in contrast to the transformational change theorists, the transformative learning theorists focus on change at the individual level. This focus is based on adult learning theory and psychological development theory; both center on individual growth and maturation and view organizations as the context for change, not the target of the transformational process. Argyris, Bridges, and Revans addressed both the organization and the individual. Argyris and Bridges specified that learning and change must start with the individual and then spread to the organization. Third, with this unanimous focus on the individual, it is not surprising that the transformative learning theorists all provide rich and detailed descriptions of the characteristics of the transformed individual. Interestingly, these characteristics are not inconsistent with the characteristics that the transformational change theorists say are desirable in the individual. The article will elaborate on this in the following section.

TABLE 2: Comparison of Change Theories

<i>Theorist/Author</i>	<i>Process for Organizational Transformation</i>	<i>Characteristics of a Transformed Organization</i>	<i>Process for Individual Transformation</i>	<i>Characteristics of Transformed Individual</i>
Lippitt/Watson/Westley	X	X		X
Burke/Litwin	X	X		X
Nevis/Lancourt/Vassalo	X	X		X
Conner	X	X		X
Kotter	X	X		X
Beckhard/Pritchard	X	X		X
Nadler	X	X		X
Cooperrider	X	X		X
Freire		X	X	X
Kegan			X	X
Argyris	X	X	X	X
Lewin/Schein	X	X	X	X
Mezirow	X	X	X	X
Bridges	X	X	X	X
Revans	X	X	X	X

Comparing Transformative Learning and Transformational Change

The review of both transformative learning theory and transformational change theory, as well as of key theorists in both schools of thought, has provided insights into similarities and differences among the theorists in each group. In addition, Table 1 compares all the theorists reviewed in this article on four aspects of change programs: (a) process for organizational transformation, (b) characteristics of a transformed organization, (c) process for individual transformation, and (d) characteristics of a transformed individual.

Table 2 summarizes Table 1 by indicating those aspects (marked with an X) that each of the theorists addresses. Those aspects that are not addressed by a particular theorist are left blank. Those blank cells that indicate an absence of a process for individual transformation highlight where transformative learning theory can complement and enhance transformational change theory. Table 2 helps to more clearly present this deficiency in many of the transformational change theories reviewed in this article.

You will also note that all of the change theorists reviewed in this article articulate characteristics of a transformed individual. Therefore, all the theorists clearly believe that change or transformation at the individual level is an essential outcome of the change process. The difference, then, lies in *how* they see change occurring at the individual level. As previously discussed, many transformational change theorists assume that if the environment and

system change, individuals will also adapt and change; therefore, they do not have a need to articulate a process of internal change at the individual level. This behavioristic perspective sees environmental changes, training, and extrinsic rewards as the most effective tools for affecting change at the individual level and characterizes the transformed individual as having new skills, new behaviors, positive attitudes, motivation, and so forth. For the transformative learning theorists, individual change is not a matter of conforming to external changes and events but rather an internal process of transforming perspectives and frames of reference through critical reflection. They characterize the transformed individual as empowered, self-aware, self-directing, principled, and autonomous. These words connote mature, responsible, and self-motivated adults, whom any organization would desire to have in its workforce.

One characteristic consistently cited by all the theorists is commitment. The transformational change theorists point to involvement in the change process as producing commitment, whereas the transformative learning theorists see commitment as a matter of aligning the individual's values and beliefs with those of the organization. *Commitment* should not be confused with *conformity*. Conformity involves being "obedient or compliant," whereas commitment is "an agreement or pledge to do something in the future" (*Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 2000). Commitment, then, implies a personal decision to participate at an intellectual and emotional level, not a response to a directive from a higher authority or social pressures.

I believe that commitment or conformity as two different outcomes of organizational change involving two different perspectives of individual change may be at the heart of the disappointing results in transformational change efforts in organizations. Changing structures, processes, policies, and extrinsic rewards may result merely in conformity rather than in the deeper commitment all the theorists speak of. This lack of "connectedness" of an individual to the organization at a deeper level may also explain the growing literature on bringing "soul" back in to the workplace (Ciulla, 2000; Cox, 1996; Pollard, 1996; Secretan, 1997). If this is so, transformative learning theory can complement and enhance transformational change efforts in organizations by fostering commitment as opposed to conformity.

Another noteworthy aspect of the comparison is the link seen by the five theorists who do address transformational change at both the individual and organizational levels. Mezirow only lightly touched on how transformative learning influences the power structures and learning within the organization. Lewin, however, developed his field theory considering human behavior as a function of both the person and the environment. Consequently, he addressed the change process at both the individual and the organizational levels. Not surprisingly Argyris, who was influenced by Lewin's work, also

focused strongly on both levels. Central to Argyris's theory of organizational change and learning is his concept of single-loop and double-loop learning. Double-loop learning entails reflection and change in values, assumptions, and strategies. Argyris (1999) stated that double-loop learning must begin at the individual level and then spread to the organizational level. Bridges (1991) first focused on the individual in the change process but soon recognized that organizations were the most prevalent context and cause for disorienting change and applied his model to change at both levels. Revans (1982) identified three interactive systems in action learning: System alpha deals with the management decision process, system beta is the group learning process, and system gamma addresses learning at the individual level.

This explicit link between transformative learning on the individual level and transformational change at the organizational level suggests an integrated approach for effective change. Other scholars are now making similar connections in their thinking about transformational change. This relationship between transformational change and transformative learning is the main topic of the next section.

Linking Transformative Learning With Organizational Change

In addition to Mezirow, Lewin, Williams, Argyris, and Revans, other scholars have explored the relationship between individual and organizational transformation. Brooks (1992) discussed a qualitative case study conducted in a *Fortune* 500 company that examines the relationship between individual learning and organizational transformation. At the time of the study, the company was in its fourth year of a transformational change effort that had been triggered by government deregulation. Managers, who were identified as actively trying to reestablish an organizational fit with the environment, were interviewed to gain insight into the relationship between individual learning and organizational transformation. Participants who described themselves as having made a transformative shift in their view of the world commented on becoming more reflective about their assumptions, attitudes, and behavior:

They reordered what they saw to be important in life and struggled to change dysfunctional attitudes, behaviors, policies and practices. At the heart of this shift was their coming to understand the existence of more than one reality. Losing their belief in the universality of their own culturally based and personally constructed view of the world, many of these managers granted that alternative realities, interpretations, and perspectives are not necessarily wrong and acknowledged that their own worldview was arbitrary. (p. 331)

Brooks also pointed out that the managers' recognition that areas of the company were "out of sync" was not sufficient; good management practice required moving beyond thought to action.

In another study, Brooks (1999) examined the role of cultural reflection in one of the “Baby Bells” going through radical change due to the legally mandated breakup of AT&T in 1984. This was again a qualitative study; it consisted of interviews with 29 managers in the organization. Brooks concluded that critical reflection was useful in improving work practices, dealing with moral and ethical dilemmas, and evaluating goals and strategies in the organization.

Brooks’s (1992, 1999) studies showed that critical reflection is essential, but if subsequent learning does not lead to action, it has little value to the organization’s efforts to transform itself. Combined, these two critical elements—critical reflection and action—can be a powerful catalyst for organizational change and are the foundation of the increasingly popular approach to learning in organizations, action learning. Action learning demonstrates an explicit link between transformative learning and transformational change in organizations. Action learning also demonstrates that critical reflection can be practiced on a group level as well as on the individual level, which greatly increases its utility for organizational transformation.

Action learning is both a process and powerful program that involves a small group of people solving real problems while at the same time focusing on what they are learning and how their learning can benefit each group member and the organization as a whole. (Marquardt, 1999, p. 4)

Yorks et al. (1999) described four schools of action learning practice: scientific, experiential, critical reflection, and tacit. They explained that the goals of the critical reflection school are personal and organizational transformation. The intended outcome is breakthrough thinking, which can lead to discontinuous change. Yorks and Marsick (2000) elaborated by presenting how the four schools can be conceptualized in a pyramid with the critical reflection school in the uppermost position. The critical reflection mode is most conducive to transformative learning. Yorks and Marsick affirmed the essential nature of critical reflection to transformative learning in their discussion of a study involving a critical reflection program that took place over a 3-year period in a multinational food company. The company’s goal was organizational transformation into an integrated global network organization (Yorks et al., 1998). A field study design using interviews and participant observer field notes was employed. The data from the study demonstrated a pervasive pattern of transformative learning that occurred without management prompts and before the actual organizational restructuring began.

Dilworth and Willis (1999) discussed action learning in the context of organizational change and renewal. They stated that the primary reason for interest in action learning is frustration with traditional approaches to organizational change. Another reason is, “the close alignment between the essence of action learning and the coalescence of corporate strategies

around what are considered key drivers of competitive advantage. They include the need for transformative learning at both individual and organizational levels” (p. 75).

Implications for HRD

Transformational change for organizations is extremely challenging and resource intensive. Failure to achieve change objectives is costly in terms of both human and financial capital. HRD has the opportunity, if not the responsibility, to lead transformational change efforts in organizations. Four areas are particularly suited to HRD involvement. First, HRD can guide management in defining change initiatives as transactional or transformational. Each requires a different approach, and often what is intended to be a transactional change evolves into a transformational effort without management acknowledging the difference. Assessing and framing change initiatives accurately can greatly increase the change initiative’s degree of success.

Second, critical reflection is essential for transformational change at both the individual and organizational levels. HRD’s coaching of management and members of the organization in critical reflection skills will enhance the level of critical thinking within the organization and facilitate the introduction of group processes such as action learning. Studying the adult learning theorists discussed in this article will give an HRD practitioner a good theoretical foundation from which to develop programs to promote critical thinking skills in their organization.

Third, cultural change is an integral component of transformational change efforts in organizations. Schein (1992) has explained that cultural change is complex, and depending on the growth stage of the culture, it will require different approaches. HRD must help management assess the current culture and determine what elements must change to align it with the new strategic direction of the company. Once this has been determined, HRD must develop and lead the process for cultural change within the organization.

Fourth, for most organizations, diversity is a major initiative that can be characterized as both transformative learning at the individual level and transformational change at the organizational level. Kegan (1994) stated that when we address diversity simply through workplace training, we run the risk of reducing it to a required skill. Respecting and valuing diversity cannot be accomplished with informational training but only through transformational learning, “a leading out from an established habit of mind” (p. 232). HRD should enable the organization, both at the individual level and the organizational level, to reflect critically on what it means to value differences and to integrate respect for diversity into the organization’s culture.

By doing so, HRD will play an integral role in developing a significant competitive advantage for their organizations through improved performance as a consequence of accessing a richer and more diverse pool of resources.

Conclusion

Organizational change has become increasingly complex. Words like *transformational* and *discontinuous* have become the buzzwords in the vocabulary of change. Change is different today. As the term “discontinuous” indicates, there are no longer periods of stability in which members of an organization can slowly assimilate and adjust. Strategic shifts and mergers rip simultaneously at the cultural fabric of organizations; new technologies are introduced at a relentless rate. Job security is a thing of the past, and multiple moves in a career are now the reality for today’s workforce. All this serves to produce the kind of “disorienting dilemma” for individuals that Mezirow (1991) described as the trigger for transformative learning.

Some of the change theorists reviewed in this article work under the assumption that, by changing structure, work processes, and climate in the organization, one can affect change in individuals. But is this approach to change sufficient to bring about the transformational change? Although these elements of change may be necessary, they do not appear sufficient. Those theorists who see change as starting with the individual present a more comprehensive and deeper view of the change phenomenon in organizations, a view which states that to achieve truly transformative change in the organization and move to a higher level of performance, the individual must become aligned within the new structure, the work processes, and the culture of an organization.

But how do individuals adapt, commit, and grow in an environment of discontinuous change? The studies referenced in this article point to the potential role of critical reflection and transformative learning. A concept primarily based in adult learning, critical reflection can now be seen in the broader context of organizational change as essential to both individual and organizational transformation. The discussion of action learning demonstrates how reflection and learning at both the individual and group levels can foster real learning and real change in an organization. But this is not new information, and if critical reflection can facilitate transformational change in organizations, why have so many organizational change theorists failed to incorporate it into their theories? Is it simply that these theorists subscribe to a behavioristic view of learning and change and see no need to address internal processes? Additional research is needed to answer this question.

Most important, research is needed to assess whether approaches that address transformation at both the individual and organizational levels pro-

duce better outcomes than approaches that focus on only the organizational level and factors external to the individual. One approach to future research could involve conducting case studies of different organizations attempting to execute major transformation using the different theories presented in this article. Outcomes of the different change efforts could then be compared to substantiate or refute the premise of this article. HRD can and should take the lead in this continued research because it will have significant implications for the growth and development of both the individuals and the organizations of which they are members. Much is at stake in pursuing a more effective approach to radical and discontinuous change in today's organizations; therefore, this topic is worthy of considerable attention by all stakeholders in organizational change.

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