



Organizational change as practice: a critical analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to challenge some taken-for-granted practices related to organizational change in order to understand how organizational change as practice is conditioned by mundane assumptions.

Design/methodology/approach – A critical analysis of the taken-for-granted assumptions revealed by a literature review was conducted utilizing practice theory approach in which human behavior and social context are intertwined. Hence, the analysis of this theoretical paper focuses on practices, praxis and practitioners in organizational change.

Findings – The results suggest that certain elements that are believed to be universal in organizational change are, in fact, particular within context. The key finding and message of this research is that organizational change in practice is a manifestation of particularity. The conclusion is that certain mundane assumptions condition organizational change practices by ignoring the importance of power, phronesis and paradox, which lie in human interaction within social context.

Research limitations/implications – The proposal that the dominating discourse on organizational change involves some taken-for-granted assumptions, challenges scholars to question the ways organizations are currently studied, and perhaps draws more attention to power, context and particularity in future research.

Practical implications – The analysis demonstrates that the social aspect of organizational realities is crucial in organizational change, and should not be underestimated by the practitioners in the process. This realism of practice complexity indicates that the pitfalls of organizational change are more context dependent and thus, more numerous than generally is assumed.

Originality/value – This research contributes to both theory and practice by offering a critical view on some of the taken-for-granted organizational change practices. This paper also demonstrates originality by introducing the concept of “organizational change as practice” in analogue of “strategy as practice” (SAP).

Keywords Organizational change, Particularity, Practice, Practitioner, Praxis, Universality

Paper type Research paper

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Introduction

It is widely accepted among scholars that organizational change is an extremely difficult reality in practice, as over 70 percent of organizational change efforts fail (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Burke, 2011; Cinite *et al.*, 2009). A planned organizational change means intentionally increasing employee stress levels (Dahl, 2011), knowingly disturbing the ongoing operations (Currie *et al.*, 2009; Pache and Santos, 2010) and consciously gambling with the organization's future as the outcome is often different to the original plan (Jian, 2011; Whittle *et al.*, 2010). Thus, organizational change practices are in the interest of both scholars and practitioners. Research about organizational change mostly concern topics like change processes (Schreyögg and Sydow, 2011), leadership (Battilana *et al.*, 2010), change execution (Van de Ven and Sun, 2011), change reception within the organization (Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007), discourse (Grant



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and Marshak, 2011), or paradoxes (Smith and Lewis, 2011). Although the role of practices in this literature is quite significant, some assumptions related to them are rarely questioned.

Organizational change is a communicative action (Jian, 2011) that can be approached through the lenses of universality or particularity, (Flyvbjerg, 1998). Universality in this study is defined as “the commonly applicable” while particularity is defined as “the locally applicable”. While change literature provides convincing explanations to the challenges practitioners face with complex change processes and proposes well justified methods to overcome them, discourse on change practices has a tone of universality over particularity. Universals should, however, be seriously questioned, because “nothing in society is fundamental” (Foucault, 1988). The purpose of this theoretical paper is to critically analyze some of the taken-for-granted assumptions identified in the organizational change literature related to practice, to evaluate how these mundane assumptions condition organizational change as practice (Vaara and Whittington, 2012), and to propose a theoretical model that advances our understanding of why organizational change is so difficult in practice.

Practice has many definitions. For example, practice is “embodied, materially mediated arrays of human activity centrally organized around shared practical understanding” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 2), or “practices are linked and implicit ways of understanding, saying, and doing things” (Schau *et al.*, 2009, p. 31). In this research, the concept of practice is considered as a dimension of activity within socially constructed context, and the concept of “organizational change as practice” is regarded as shared understanding of organizational change practices in theory.

The paper starts by introducing and explaining the research methods used. The key results of the organizational change literature review are shared first by outlining the philosophy of change and second by introducing three taken-for-granted assumptions. Next, these assumptions are critically analyzed utilizing the key framework used in strategy-as-practice literature which focuses on practices, praxis and practitioners (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). The findings suggest that certain taken-for-granted assumptions in the current organizational change literature overlook the meaning of context and particularity, which according to practice theory are central to social change to succeed. Finally, concluding arguments are offered including proposals for further research.

Research methodology

This article is developed based on a literature review and a complementing critical analysis utilizing practice theory lens. As the purpose of this research is to critically evaluate how the taken-for-granted assumptions regarding organizational change condition organizational change as practice, practice theory is a logical choice since it analyses practice (change) in its social environment (organization). Practice approach is also suitable in analyzing discursive interaction and related social practices (Fenton and Langley, 2011; Grant and Marshak, 2011), which organizational change is mostly about (Jian, 2011).

Two key criteria led the selection process for the studies included in the review: high quality and actuality. Electronic searches for the term change, looking for articles that explain organizational change (i.e. organizational transformation, organizational design, mergers, strategic change, institutional change, change management or change

implementation) were conducted for each journal in the 2010 Journal Citation Reports on business and management with an impact factor of ≥ 1.0 using EBSCOhost in the *Business Source Complete* database. Furthermore, in order to find other highly relevant and supporting material, electronic searches were conducted on the same database without preselecting the journals or the publishing year. Finally, 108 articles from 38 of the world's leading journals met all the criteria above (Table I).

Overview of organizational change research

Despite the rich variety of research on organizational change, a current, holistic review of the topic is missing, the reason most likely being the complexity and the depth of the phenomenon. Topical reviews about organizational change do exist, but their analysis is presented from a specific perspective, such as reactions to change (Oreg *et al.*, 2011; Thomas and Hardy, 2011), duality characteristics in organizing (Graetz and Smith, 2008), or sustaining organizational change (Buchanan *et al.*, 2005).

The philosophy of change

Change is about dualities. The origins of the duality approach can be linked back to the Han Dynasty in China and the early days of Taoism, when the Taoists believed that human situations could be balanced as yin and yang, two opposing elements complementing each other. In this dialectical view of reality perhaps lies the basis of all change (Morgan, 2006). Coexisting opposing elements tend to create paradox, a central element to organizational change (Graetz and Smith, 2008; Farjoun, 2010; Lüscher and Lewis, 2008). Graetz and Smith (2008) propose that even though contrary features, stability and change coexist in organizations their relationship may be treated as a paradox. Farjoun (2010) on the other hand, suggests that stability and change are not paradoxical, and rethinking their relationship may help in recognizing some of the threats dualism may cause in the way organizations are studied and guided.

As change unfolds, change and continuity are balanced in sets of simultaneous processes (Sonenshein, 2010). Thus, organizational change can be characterized as a process (Butler and Allen, 2008; Jian, 2011; Schreyögg and Sydow, 2011). Organizational change is a complex, dialectical process, where the motor of change develops and is developed by the process itself, and where old and new intertwine, cumulatively building an innovative dynamic (Castel and Friedberg, 2010). Organizational change process is not necessarily linear, because it can evolve in both progressive and retrogressive ways (Ambos and Birkinshaw, 2010), retrogressive change being a kind of re-development towards the original state before regression occurred (Lewin, 1951). So change does not just happen, it is interactive by nature (Castel and Friedberg, 2010).

Taken-for-granted assumptions on organizational change

The assumptions which seem self-evident and non-exotic are the most interesting to look more in detail (Chia and MacKay, 2007; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). The purpose of this study is to challenge some taken-for-granted assumptions related to organizational change in order to understand if and how organizational change as practice is conditioned by these mundane assumptions. Next, three examples of the taken-for-granted assumptions revealed by the review are introduced.

Table I.
The journals used in the review

Journal	JISSN	JCR Impact Factor 2010	Number of articles exposed by primary search criteria	Number of articles selected from primary search criteria	Number of additional articles selected from secondary search criteria	The journal representation in the review in terms of number of selected articles (%)
<i>Academy of Management Journal</i>	0001-4273	5.250	36	7		6
<i>Academy of Management Perspectives</i>	1558-9080	2.470	12	1		1
<i>Academy of Management Review</i>	0363-7425	6.720	26	3	1	4
<i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>	0001-8392	3.684	10	1		1
<i>British Journal of Management</i>	1045-3172	1.385	22	2		2
<i>Business Ethics Quarterly</i>	1052-150X	3.256	8	1		1
<i>California Management Review</i>	0008-1256	1.706	14	3		3
<i>Corporate Governance</i>	0964-8410	2.753	2	1		1
<i>European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology</i>	1359-432X	1.489	6	1		1
<i>Group and Organization Management</i>	1059-6011	2.415	8	2		2
<i>Harvard Business Review</i>	0017-8012	1.873	85	7	1	7
<i>Human Relations</i>	0018-7267	1.701	26	4		4
<i>Human Resource Management</i>	0090-4848	1.341	25	1		1
<i>Human Resource Management Review</i>	1053-4822	2.796	5	0	1	1
<i>Industrial Marketing Management</i>	0019-8501	1.694	12	1		1
<i>International Journal of Management Reviews</i>	1460-8545	2.641	3	1	1	2
<i>The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science</i>	0021-8863	1.682	82	11		10
<i>The Journal of Business Economics and Management</i>	1611-1699	3.866	8	2		2
<i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>	0167-4544	1.125	95	3		3
<i>Journal of Business Research</i>	0148-2963	1.773	13	3		3
<i>Journal of Management</i>	0149-2063	3.747	12	1		1
<i>Journal of Management Inquiry</i>	1056-4926	1.283	32	1		1
<i>Journal of Management Studies</i>	0022-2380	3.817	21	4		4
<i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i>	0894-3796	2.351	19	1		1
<i>Journal of the Operational Research Society</i>	0160-5682	1.102	9	1		1
<i>The Leadership Quarterly</i>	1048-9843	2.902	15	4	1	5

(continued)

Table I.

Journal	JISSN	JCR Impact Factor 2010	Number of articles exposed by primary search criteria	Number of articles selected from primary search criteria	Number of additional articles selected from secondary search criteria	The journal representation in the review in terms of number of selected articles (%)
<i>Management Communication Quarterly</i>	0893-3189	1.109	9	3		3
<i>Management Decision</i>	0025-1747	1.078	26	1		1
<i>Management Science</i>	0025-1909	2.221	7	1		1
<i>Organization</i>	1350-5084	1.488	12	2		2
<i>Organization Science</i>	1047-7039	3.800	51	9		8
<i>Organization Studies</i>	0170-8406	2.339	49	2	1	3
<i>Personnel Psychology</i>	0031-5826	3.367	5	2		2
<i>Public Management Review</i>	1471-9037	1.295	18	1		1
<i>Research in Organizational Behavior</i>	0191-3085	4.833	5	6		6
<i>Scandinavian Journal of Management</i>	0956-5221	1.108	15	5		5
<i>Strategic Management Journal</i>	0143-2095	3.583	28	1		1
<i>Strategic Organization</i>	1476-1270	2.727	9	2		2
Sum	<i>n</i> = 38		840	102	6	100
Other journals and articles identified by search criteria	<i>n</i> = 80	≥ 1.0	500	0		

Note: Number of articles exposed by primary search criteria = 1,340; Number of selected articles = 108; Percent of selected articles = 8

Although the relevance of substance and context to organizational change is acknowledged among scholars, one dominating assumption seems to be that organizational change practices are universal in nature (Kotter, 2007; Martin *et al.*, 2009; Miles, 2010; Schaffer, 2010). Opposite views do exist, but they are a minority. In their literature review on dualities in organizing, Graetz and Smith (2008, p. 274) highlight the difference between the “hardware and the software of strategizing”, the difference between practice and praxis, suggesting that both are necessary in organizing. The reasons for emphasizing universalities could be many: First, universal patterns are easier to understand and prove. Second, the nature of particular practices is peculiar. Particularities are difficult to learn externally as they are constructed in the context dependent “practical wisdom”, which in turn puts great challenges on the empirical research methodologies that might require long-time participation and auto-ethnography. Third, although gaining growing interest among scholars, sociological poststructuralist approaches in organizational research are still considered marginal.

The second identified mundane assumption in this research concerns change resistance, which is often approached as a phenomenon that is generated as a result of change (Danisman, 2010) provoking the taken-for-granted assumption that resistance is targeted towards the change itself (Levay, 2010). For example, an extensive, 60-year review of quantitative studies on change recipients’ reactions to organizational change by Oreg *et al.* (2011), shows that studies focusing on reasons to resist change beyond change *per se* (simultaneous consideration of practice, practitioners and praxis) are marginal.

The third taken-for-granted assumption revealed by the review is that change practitioners act as members of groups defined by organizational hierarchy. These taken-for-granted practitioner groups are for example the top management (Barron *et al.*, 2010; Ndofo *et al.*, 2009; Zhang and Rajagopalan, 2010), the middle management (Lüscher and Lewis, 2008; Plowman *et al.*, 2007; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011) or the change agents (Schwarz *et al.*, 2011; Stensaker and Langley, 2010).

Next, the taken-for-granted assumptions of organizational change are further analyzed utilizing the three primary dimensions commonly used in practice theory; practices (change-making), praxis (how change takes place), and practitioners (the actors involved) (Jarzabkowski, 2003; Vaara and Whittington, 2012). A summary of the analysis is presented in Table II, comparing the more traditional, dominating assumptions with the slowly emerging critical assumptions in the field of organizational studies. Examples of the key root references for the traditional view is for example Kurt Lewin (1951), and for the critical view for example Andrew Pettigrew (born in 1944) (Buchanan *et al.*, 2005; Whittle *et al.*, 2010).

A critical analysis of the taken-for-granted assumptions utilizing the practice theory lens

Organizational change practices

Practices are dimensions of activity within socially constructed context, such as rules, tools, methods, meetings, socio-material practices, and discursive practices (Garfinkel, 1967; Jarzabkowski and Seidl, 2008; Orlikowski, 2007). Scholars offer interesting insights to organizational change practices such as leadership approaches, planning methods, strategy processes, personnel engagement, conflict management, and

Traditional view	Selected exemplars	Critical view	Selected exemplars
<i>Practice</i> Organizational change practices are universal in nature	Kotter (2007), Martin <i>et al.</i> (2009), Miles (2010)	Organizational change practices are particular within context	Buchanan <i>et al.</i> (2005), Graetz and Smith (2008), Whittle <i>et al.</i> (2010)
<i>Praxis</i> Change resistance is about resisting the planned changes	Cameron (2008) Danisman (2010), Oreg <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Resistance is about resisting human action, power, or practitioners holding the power of change	Erkama (2010), Thomas and Hardy (2011), Vaara and Tienari (2011)
<i>Practitioners</i> Change practitioners act upon their organizational hierarchy groupings	Cinire <i>et al.</i> (2009), Clark and Soulsby (2007), Rouleau and Balogun (2011)	Change practitioners act upon emotional, contextual and identity factors	Battilana (2011), Nag <i>et al.</i> (2007), Schwarz <i>et al.</i> (2011)

Table II.
The taken-for-granted assumptions on organizational change as practice

communication practices (Currie and Lockett, 2007; Ford *et al.*, 2008; Pache and Santos, 2010; Stensaker *et al.*, 2008).

Following the re-growing interest on practice theory (Baxter and Chua, 2008), discursive practices are also becoming popular means to approach organizational change (Grant and Marshak, 2011). This important trend leverages our understanding of organizational change because discourse is the practice through which change evolves together with other practices. The logic of discourse does not necessarily follow official organizational hierarchies, since discourse evolves also through partial organizations and networks (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011; Schwarz *et al.*, 2011). Discourse is the key place, reality and process through which organizational change is made sense of, formulated, and practiced (Grant and Marshak, 2011; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). The assumption that organizational change practices are universal in nature is thus challenged, because according to practice theory, human action and discourse are particular within context (Gunder, 2010; Sherrard, 1991; Whittington, 2006). In fact, applying universal practices as “best practices” might condition organizational change in practice by overemphasizing techniques over contextual factors and by ignoring rhetorics or contextually dominating discursive norms.

Organizational change praxis

Praxis is the intellectual dimension of human action (Schatzki, 2002). In praxis, individual behavior constructs within social practices. The change initiative and the organization affect each other over time through individuals’ talk, and thus, the final form of change result is impossible to fully predetermine because it is a product of multiple local discourse involving reinterpretation, recitations and interests constructed during the discourse (Detert and Pollock, 2008; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007; Whittle *et al.*, 2010). In other words, people’s talk influences the change and the change influences people’s talk. As these discourses construct and develop, they may become mythically colored stories that either support management or play against the change initiative or even expose failure (Bathurst and Monin, 2010;

Schwarz *et al.*, 2011). A story, whether true or not, is an example of organizational change praxis, as praxis brings out the human intervention inside change implementation processes.

Praxis unfolds for example within choices, details, events, sensemaking, and resistance, all influenced by emotions (Avey *et al.*, 2008; Rouleau and Balogun, 2011; Stensaker and Langley, 2010). Frustration, anger and fear are examples of the negative emotions that organizational change may provoke in employees (Fugate *et al.*, 2008; Liu and Perrewé, 2005). Some people remain silent out of fear of negative personal or professional consequences. Employees in avoiding the unpleasant characteristics of fear may develop fear-based silence behavior (Kish-Gephart *et al.*, 2009). On the other hand, positive emotions, employees' positive resources and positive psychological capital may significantly contribute to the success of any organizational change by defeating negative reactions, such as cynicism and deviance (Avey *et al.*, 2008).

Change resistance, that is the employees' undesirable attitude or behavior in response to the management's change efforts as they try to maintain the status quo, is a widely accepted phenomenon in organizational studies (Erkama, 2010; Stensaker and Langley, 2010; Zoller and Fairhurst, 2007). Social learning and local context are important factors for an individual in deciding whether to approve change initiatives and participate in them (Bercovitz and Feldman, 2008). Frustration and negative emotions may lead to change resistance, even crisis (Danisman, 2010; Levay, 2010). However, because resistance is thoughtful, Ford *et al.* (2008) propose that resistance can be seen as a valuable asset for change since it may generate scrutiny and well-considered counterarguments, and thus, in some cases lead to a positive spur in the change discussion.

Praxis in the change literature is approached less universally than practices, due to the evident relevance of human action and the fact that praxis is a core dimension of practice theory (Vaara and Whittington, 2012). In the literature, an example of the taken-for-granted assumption in praxis is, however, identifiable. Change resistance, although linked to social learning and local context, is largely considered about resisting the planned changes (Cameron, 2008; Danisman, 2010; Bercovitz and Feldman, 2008). To practice theorists, human action and power are central in social change (Bourdieu, 1990; Foucault, 1984). Following this analogue, change resistance is not necessarily about resisting the actual change, but it could as well be about resisting human action, power, or practitioners holding the power of change. Change, in this critical view, would then represent an excuse, a possibility space for resisting activity, which ultimately becomes a power battle between individuals, their wills and emotions (Vaara and Tienari, 2011). Change resistance is thus a competition about power, about who gets to decide or who has the authority over others. These competitions are particular within context because the struggles are unique among individuals, but they are also universal as a phenomenon since power struggles, visible or not, are everywhere (Foucault, 1988). Treating resistance as a duality between current and future organizational models, conditions organizational change practices to overemphasize change methods, tools, and mechanistic justifications and to underemphasize humanity and emotionality.

Organizational change practitioners

A critical element that ties change practitioners together is organizational identity (Clark *et al.*, 2010). Organizational identity inheres in work practices, so that the cognitive dimension of identity “who we are as an organization” needs to be complemented by another dimension that involves “what we do as a collective” (Nag *et al.*, 2007). According to Ravasi and Phillips (2011) identity claims should mirror and communicate the desired organizational image, and this may lead to identity drift, which is a gradual identity change that can be explained by misalignment of past and future beliefs, and may cause identity discrepancy. An organization may also create a transitional identity as one response to organizational change, because it helps people to let go of their former organizational identities and build new ones (Clark *et al.*, 2010). Similarly, through splitting identification, individuals may choose the elements they value in the current identification while simultaneously seeking out new elements through change (Gutierrez *et al.*, 2010).

One taken-for-granted assumption in the literature is that the change practitioners act as their organizational hierarchy grouping indicates, such as the board, the CEOs, the top management, the middle management, or the change agents (Clark and Soulsby, 2007; Greve and Mitsuhashi, 2007; Schwarz *et al.*, 2011; Stensaker and Langley, 2010; Zhang and Rajagopalan, 2010). Another widely used grouping of change practitioners is to categorize individuals either as the change promoters or the change recipients (Palmer, 2008; Stensaker and Falkenberg, 2007). These groupings are perhaps utile in analyzing organizational change, but following the logic of practice theory, human action in social structures is a complex phenomenon and indicates a need to look beyond the taken-for-granted practitioner groupings.

An interesting option to group objects is offered for example by Foucault (1966, p. 13), in “The order of things”, who refers to a text that quotes “a certain Chinese dictionary”. According to this example animals were grouped as follows: “a) the ones that belong to the Empire, b) the embalmed ones, c) the tamed ones, d) pigs, e) mermaids, f) legendary, g) running dogs, h) the ones that are categorized here, i) the ones that rampage like crazy, j) the countless, k) the ones that are drawn with fine camel’s hair brush, l) and so on, m) the ones that just broke a crock, l) the ones that from far remind a fly.” This grouping departs from the universal, and as such illustrates that alternative and particular, even utopian, approaches to thinking are possible. If organizational change practitioners are grouped and treated purely as universal groups based on the organizational hierarchy, it might limit the way practitioner roles, actions and motivations are analyzed and practiced. For example, since organizational identity strongly influences the way change is experienced among practitioners, this critical view highlights the need to explore further the origins and varieties of these identities.

Manifestation of particularity in organizational change as practice

The key finding and message of this research is that organizational change in practice is a manifestation of particularity. Change provokes the reality in man bounded by his social arena, which is constructed of particular factors, such as power (struggle is part of life), phronesis (social codes do exist), and conflict (tension is in the heart of change) (Erkama, 2010; Farjoun, 2010; Schatzki, 2002; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Based on the review, the current discourse of organizational change seems to overlook this social

arena and focuses instead on a slightly naïve puzzle of communicative reason for change (promotion of discourse centered change management), episteme (promotion of strategy and planning driven change initiation) and consensus (promotion of striving towards consensus whilst admitting the challenges).

Bent Flyvbjerg (1998) in his article “Habermas and Foucault: thinkers for civil society?” offers a thorough analysis of how universality and particularity are central elements in understanding social change. Drawing on his research and focusing on the tension between consensus and conflict which is deeply characteristic to organizational change (Smith and Lewis, 2011), this study proposes a critical view on organizational change as practice. The critical view promotes the relevance of particularity, because organizational change in practice is about power, phronesis and conflict, all interrelated and context dependent phenomena in change, illustrated in Table III.

Building on the above examples on how particularity is manifested in the literature, and in order to clarify the results of this research, a theoretical model is developed. This theoretical model is named as “the paradox of organizational change as practice” (Figure 1). The model compares the key elements of organizational change as practice (practice, praxis and practitioners) from two different perspectives; the perspective of universality and the perspective of particularity, and shows that the universal approach creates an illusion of control over change, and the particular approach reveals the

Power	Phronesis	Conflict
<i>Practice</i> Systemic power balance is controlled by institutional (particular) practices, not by the management (e.g. Jarzabkowski, 2003)	Practice can be better understood through phronesis, as phronesis explains the particular in practice (e.g. Gunder, 2010)	Change as practice provokes multiple tensions in multiple directions creating a particular complexity (e.g. Smith and Lewis, 2011)
<i>Praxis</i> Action exercises power departing from the particular (e.g. Flyvbjerg, 1998)	Phronesis is the “practical wisdom” learned over time through praxis, the particular social action (e.g. Flyvbjerg, 2001)	The central tension to social change between consensus and conflict is challenged by particularity within praxis (e.g. Flyvbjerg, 1998)
<i>Practitioners</i> Discourses of different organizational practitioners impact the power development, which is thus not static nor universal (e.g. Erkama, 2010)	Phronesis reveals practitioners’ insightful deliberation to action, and thus, requires understanding also about the particular as “action is about particulars” (e.g. Aristotle in Schatzki, 2002)	Commitment of multiple stakeholders with competing demands may be shaped with particularities, such as rhetoric-in-context (e.g. Jarzabkowski and Sillince, 2007)
<i>Manifestation of particularity in organizational change as practice</i> Power is hidden in practice, exercised in praxis, and demonstrated by the practitioners. Power is woven in each organizational change in a particular way	Phronesis is the social code of practice among practitioners in action. Particularity is thus manifested in every relevant aspect of organizational change	Conflict is a fundamental element in change. In social context, conflicts are particular because social contexts are particular

Table III.
The manifestation of particularity in organizational change as practice

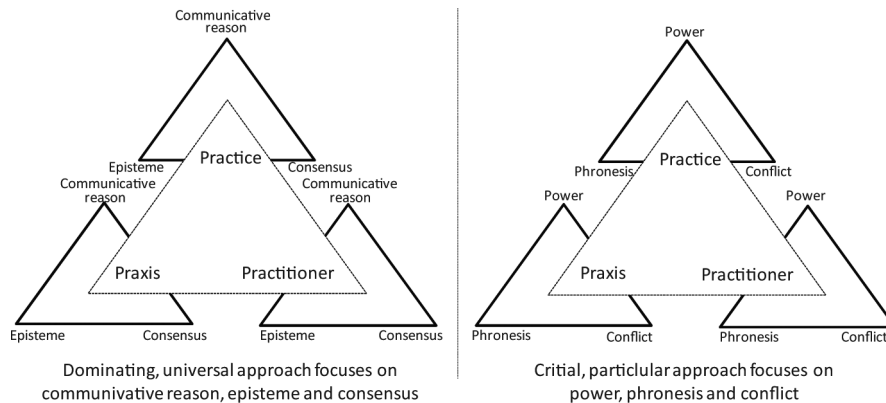


Figure 1.
The paradox of
organizational change as
practice

inability to control change. The model also invites to look deeper into the tensions between ideal and real, intention and implementation (Flyvbjerg, 1998; Smith and Lewis, 2011). Overall, this theoretical framework opens many interesting paths for the future research and is open for further development.

Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to challenge some taken-for-granted practices related to organizational change and find out how organizational change as practice is conditioned by these mundane assumptions. The literature review resulted in three examples of taken-for-granted assumptions in the current organizational change literature:

- (1) organizational change practices are universal in nature;
- (2) change resistance is about resisting the planned changes; and
- (3) change practitioners act upon their organizational hierarchy groupings.

Although these findings are interesting as such, their combined message is even more powerful; organizational change literature reveals certain taken-for-granted assumptions, and it tends to approach change rather through universalities than particularities.

By approaching organizational change through practice theory, the change theories become more practical, and the change practices more theoretical. Analyzing organizations as sets of practices instead of units of people, plans, and execution processes, reveals the actual complexity of the complexities regarding organizational change. This study proposes that what is commonly treated as universal, is, in fact particular. This finding is fundamentally important to all organizational scholars and practitioners. For example, if management seeks consensus through practical reasoning through discursive processes but underestimate power, phronesis or conflict, officially lead discourse may become superficial. Or if change discourse is guided between hierarchical groups of the organization neglecting the more complex groupings of individuals, discourse may become detached from the reality where the true power lays. Practice approach, thus, brings the human nature and social sciences in to the skin of organization theory highlighting the importance of power and context

of human action in the social arena. Practice theory benefits from widening the discussion towards organizational change, as it has so far concentrated mostly on strategy and leadership.

The implications of this study to further organizational change research are numerous. Above all, the proposal that the dominating discourse on organizational change involves some taken-for-granted assumptions which might condition the way organizational change is practiced and studied, challenges scholars to question further the ways organizations are studied and perhaps draw more attention to sociality and social structures in the future research. Many interesting questions and possible research avenues follow this path: If universal change practices are not applicable, even adjusted, to what extent practices ought to be generalized? To understand this dilemma further, more research is needed to explore the relationship between particularities and universalities in organizational change (Flyvbjerg, 1998). What are the appropriate research methodologies to study change as social practices? One direction worth further examination might be the narrative methodologies, as they can contribute in many ways to understand organizational practices (Fenton and Langley, 2011). If organizational change resistance is mostly about power struggles and not so much about the change itself, what does it mean to organizational research, research questions and methodologies that focus on resistance? One interesting avenue for future research is to approach organizational change resistance as sets of power struggles (Erkama, 2010). Or, if there are more important and influential practitioner groups inside an organization than previously presumed, how can we identify and analyze those groups and agencies? Future research could elaborate the way invisible or unpredictable social networks evolve and change in organizations (Ahrne and Brunsson, 2011). Overall, future research should critically analyze not only the taken-for-granted assumptions but also the taken-for-granted practices and the way they condition organizational change research and practices (Vaara and Whittington, 2012).

The practical implications of this study relate more than anything to understanding the central role of sociality in organizations and the particularity of context it generates. It is important to see that the complexities in organizational change are particular, as one social context is different to another. This might partially explain the poor success rates of organizational change. The results of this research might also help practitioners to better understand the obstacles in their change attempts, as organizational change is perhaps much more complex process than generally anticipated and thus, requires careful consideration before initiating one.

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