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MANAGING ENTROPY THROUGH CHANGE: DRIVING CHANGE THROUGH EMPATHY

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1. INTRODUCTION

The core purpose of this paper, as its title "Managing entropy through change: driving change through empathy" stands, is to demonstrate on the one hand the necessity of organizational change and its inevitability for organizations' survival, and on the other, to evaluate an emphatic, human-centered approach to change management. The journey through the achievement of the paper's objectives is going to begin with an analysis of theoretical definitions, models, and frameworks, such as the differentiation among organizational changes and their impact on the various subsystems within the organization, a conceptual comparison between the organizational functioning and an open system, the presentation of a causal model of organizational performance and change identifying the key factors affecting change adoption. The latter theoretical investigation is going to sustain the idea of organizational change, of different scale and scope, and change management practices as vital to any organization, and it is going to provide the background, as well, for the fulfillment of the second purpose of the paper. To this regard, the final part of the paper is going to be centered on the theoretical critical analysis of Accenture's change management methodology. The latter is going to take place as a journey through the activities and know-how acquired during the researcher's internship experience at Accenture compared and commented considering the key theoretical variables emerging from the previous analysis. As a result of the dissertation, the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology are going to be evidenced, supported by theory and facts. Thus, at the end of the process, it will be possible to critically evaluate the consulting company's change management approach, to spot areas for improvement and favorably sustain others for growth. De facto, the last paragraph of the paper shows personal considerations to the working of the model, based on the internship experience and theoretical change management discoveries.

2. CHANGE MANAGEMENT TO ENSURE A SUCCESSFUL IMPLEMENTATION OF ANY TYPE OF ORGANIZATION CHANGE

The following chapter has the aim to provide theoretical context and background to the analysis of Accenture S.p.A case of change management. De facto, the sessions into which the chapter is divided are going to answer to primary questions such as the type of organization changes that could be implemented and the individual, group, and large-organization possible responses to such changes; the inevitability of organization change and the importance of defining a change management strategy for any change to be successfully implemented. Lastly, the Burke-Litwin causal model of organization performance and change is going to set the grounds for the practical case study.

2.1 DIFFERENT TYPES OF CHANGE AND THEIR ORGANIZATIONAL IMPACT

One of the first questions this paper is attempting to answer concerns the different types of change that an organization could implement as well as their organizational impact in terms of responses to change and required change efforts.

A primary distinction results as revolutionary (or transformational) vs evolutionary (or transactional) change. The nature of revolutionary change could be better understood by referring to historian Stephen Jay Gould's (1977) theory of "punctuated equilibrium" and Gersick's (1991) research in the field. The latter theory suggests an idea of revolutionary change as a sudden disruption, perturbation, "punctuated" change to the natural inertial state of a system, followed by a newfound equilibrium. The equilibrium of the system (e.g. an organization) is determined by its "deep structure" - as Gersick (1991) states: "a network of fundamental, interdependent choices about the basic configuration into which a system's units are organized and the activities that maintain both this configuration and the system's resource exchange with the environment" (Burke, 2017). An organization's deep structure comprises the organizational culture, its mission, its structure, meaning the distribution of decision making, accountability and controlling power, as well as the way the organization manages its interactions with the external environment. In this sense, the need for revolutionary change arises from the breaking of the equilibrium generated by the organization's deep structure, meaning either disruptions to the internal network underlying the functioning of subsystems among themselves and with the environment – examples are major mergers and acquisition, changes in organizational mission, leadership, culture and strategy- , as well as major changes in the external environment that alter the organization's exchange of resources – examples are the creation of new industry technology or new industry barriers.

The resulting equilibrium, and subsequent inertia, of an organization's deep structure cause resistance to change. Gersick (1991) identifies three variables affecting resistance to change: a) cognition, b) motivation, and c) obligation. Cognition refers to the "cognitive frameworks" that individuals use to understand, interpret, and act within reality; these cognitive frameworks are models of reality, hence, limited by definition and, if on the one hand they help individuals rationalize and understand the surroundings, they also limit their incentive to find new explaining models. By motivation Gersick (1991) means the individuals' instinct to counteract the sense of loss and uncertainty that change brings about. Obligation refers to the pressure stakeholders arise on the system to restore its broken equilibrium as it previously was.

Therefore, if revolutionary change comes about in "leaps" and "disruptions" altering an organization's deep structure, evolutionary change is rather incremental and linear. Evolutionary change does not affect the primary dimensions of the organization itself, such as its primary culture, primary mission, and strategy, but it consists of any improvement to parts and subunits of the system, enacted with the aim of improving the system's performance; hence, due to their reduced change effort, about 95% of organization changes are evolutionary. Examples of evolutionary change could include also major improvements such as introducing a new information system technology, expanding product lines, or changing compensation systems.

Focusing on the internal organization, a distinction may be drawn among three different organizational levels that could be impacted by change: the individual, the group, and the large-system. It is useful to bear in mind that these three levels are constantly interacting among each other and their responsiveness to change depends also on the context in which the organization operates. Moreover, the three-level distinction is not substitute for evolutionary vs revolutionary change.

Change at the individual level has the objective of directly affecting employees and it is usually implemented to support an organization change of larger scale. These kinds of change include activities such as recruitment, selection, replacement, and displacement which are very much concerned with matching employees, based on their skills, with the most appropriate positions; training and development, which is usually directed to managers; coaching and counseling, implemented to prepare employees to a further organization change and requires alignment of the individual needs with the new organizational goals. Moreover, it is useful to analyze individual responses to organization change, with the aim of finding out a common pattern that underlines the importance of adopting change management strategies to guide a successful implementation of organization change. To this regard, many studies show how individuals, directly impacted by change, experience a journey of five emotional stages identified by the psychiatrist Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969): 1) shock and denial, 2) anger, 3) bargaining or procrastinating, 4) depression, 5) acceptance. However, it is important to stress that not all employees go through the five stages in sequence and, depending also on individual characters, some of them never overcome the denial phase. The latter is linked to the concept of resistance, previously partially covered. To this concern, Levinson’s (1976) studies demonstrate how one’s resistance to change is positively related to psychological magnitude of loss of familiar practices, know-how, position and more in general something of value to the individual, following the implementation of change. In particular, he stressed the need for organization change agents to take the experience of loss into account and provide employees with remedies to mourn the loss. Resistance to change, as Brehm's (1966) "Psychological Reactance" theory suggests, is further linked to the extent to which individuals feel change has been imposed to them rather than being included in the process of selecting and implementing the organization change. The latter occurs since employees perceive the imposition of a change as a threat to their freedom, and the more the sense of their freedom is in jeopardy the more they will resist change. Moreover, Hamrick and Cannella (1989) differentiated among three types of resistance – blind resistance, political resistance, and ideological resistance –, and identifying the kind of resistance individuals are experiencing is necessary to increase the probability of enacting effective change management measures to help overcoming it. Blind resistance is synonym for natural scarce change tolerance which could be managed through reassurance and time. Political resistance refers to one's feeling of losing something of value such as salary, position, power, job, which may be dealt with through negotiation, and focus on the long-term advantages that change can bring about. Lastly, ideological resistance is linked to the negative perception of the organization change based on differing ideas, beliefs, and philosophies. This kind of resistance may be overcome by informed persuasion largely based on facts and data. As emerged in this analysis, change agents should focus on finding remedies to achieve closure with the past and lost routines, comfort, know-how and adopt participative activities that include individuals in the change process, to counteract their resistance to change, resulting from the perceived limitation of their freedom of choice.

However, although it is useful to detect a common pattern of individuals' responsiveness to change, one must bear in mind that the variety of responses to change largely depends on the individual specifics. As Oreg (2003) highlights, individuals respond differently to new situations depending on their need to establish a routine, the extent of their emotional reactions, their short-term vs long-term focus, and their open-mindedness. Interesting is the correlation, discovered by Wanberg and Banas (2000), between one's level of self-esteem, optimism, and internal control on one hand and openness to organization change on the other, which could represent a cue for individual change management strategies.

Change implemented at group level is meant to affect the functioning of the group work, in terms of group goals, group roles, group management, and group conflict. Group work is recognized as the primary subsystem within an organization, as it represents the interaction between the individual and the organization, the social context within which the individual operates, and it shapes the employee's perception of the organizational reality. Change at group level delineates in a variety of actions such as team building activities, self-directed groups change and intergroup relations management activities. Team building activities are typically set in place to support a further organization change of greater effort and are enacted to ensure that team members are aligned on the same goals and priorities, to clarify roles and responsibilities allowing work subdivision, to analyze the group functioning in terms of group norms, decision-making power, and communication, and to assess team members' interpersonal relationships (Beckhard, 1972). In addition, change at group level can take the form of flattening the organization hierarchy by leading towards self-directed groups, characterized by greater decision-making flexibility. In this sense, change management activities may be required to ensure the effectiveness and efficiency of self-directed groups, particularly by working on the distribution of authority, leadership, self-responsibility, supportive group structure, clear and engaging group goals, access to knowledge and resources - all key aspects determining successful self-directed groups, as outlined by Hackman (1992). Lastly, change is required to deal with intergroup real conflict – which needs to be distinguished from "phony conflict" as Harvey (1977) suggests. The interaction and interdependence within organizational subunits may lead to real conflict, defined as the groups' divergence in "substantive" matters followed by highly competitive behavior that damages collaboration. The key to address such type of conflict involves setting a superordinate goal which requires group collaborating efforts to be achieved (Sherif, Harvey, Hood & Sherif 1961). As far as group responsiveness to change is concerned, change implemented at a group level can lead to group resistance, which may take the form of “turf protection and competition” – group wants its continuation and uses any fact and rationale to resist change - ; “closing ranks” – group refuses to separate – ; “changing allegiances or ownership” – group becomes a separate entity from the parent organization - ; and “demand for new leadership” – group members resist and agree to replace the change leader. Methods to deal with group resistance to change are very much alike those deemed as necessary for individual resistance: ensuring closure and participation. Thus, beneficial to the group’s embracement of organization change is adopting activities to help the group let go of the previous processes and welcome the new ones, as well as occasions to learn about the change and discuss about group’s feelings towards it and ensuring that the group is involved in the planning and implementation phases of the change.

Change at the large-system level is usually more transformational than transactional, meaning it is aimed at modifying the “deep structure” of an organization – its mission, culture, and leadership. Nevertheless, a change effort of such type is supported and reinforced by changes at group and individual levels, e.g. implementing new information technology for new business operations, determining new roles and responsibilities, team building, modifying the organization structure to enact a new strategy, modifying the compensation system to ensure commitment to new behaviors.

Large-system change commonly occurs in the form of mergers and acquisitions, joint ventures or strategic alliances, also defined as interorganizational changes; however, most of them fail in their intent due to reasons such as a misalignment in goals, in power and control between the organizations, differences in expertise and status, overoptimism in the future merger’s success, as reported by a study of Burke and Biggart (1997). Thus, change management comes about as necessary to strengthen the change success, by establishing a superordinate goal requiring strong collaboration between the parties; aligning power, expertise, and compensation systems; ensuring committed leadership styles; exploiting differences and similarities among organizations.

When taking into consideration large-system change, it is useful to bear in mind Kimberly and Nielsen's (1975) distinction among first-, second-, and third-order large-system change. First-order change affects a single subsystem within an organization (e.g. a unit or division like top management team or a business line), and it does not largely impact the entire system; second-order change effort includes various subsystems with the aim of improving a particular process of a subsystem within the organization, for example if the change effort goal is reducing absenteeism among workers, change management activities, such as training programs, will start from supervisors of those workers; third-order change involves the achievement of a large-scale outcome which depends on multiple factors, such as enhancing productivity, and cannot be obtained by first- or second-order change alone.

Furthermore, large-system change is commonly enacted in phases, following Lewin's three-phase model for change. The latter distinguishes an initial "unfreezing phase", during which the organization old system and way of conducting business is interrupted and the organization realizes that a change is deemed as necessary. Once the first phase is realized, the "movement phase" follows, and there begins the organization change by means of new operations, new technologies and so forth. The objective of the last, "refreezing phase", is reinforcing the new organizational state achieved through changes implemented during the "movement phase", via reward systems for example.

Clearly, change management strategies and plan are needed to avoid or counteract resistance to large-system change, which may take various forms: unsuccessful impact on the deep structure when the old culture and bureaucracy are too strong, lack of sense of urgency about the need for a change or even apathy by organizational members, taking on sabotaging behavior to avoid the implementation of change, or disbelief in the leader. Other than achieving closure with past behaviors and practices and including impacted organizational members in the process of planning and implementing the change, as previously discussed, other measures may be undertaken to ensure the success of large-system change. These include persuading impacted employees with the immediate need for a change through appropriate and engaging language, data, and support materials, showing long time commitment and perseverance by change agents.

An additional classification of organization change is provided by Porras and Robertson (1992): planned vs unplanned change and first-order vs second-order change. The former underlines the distinction between a thoughtful internal decision to improve some aspects of the system versus an internal response to an external unexpected change; the latter differentiates between "continuous improvement" to system characteristics and change of the organization's deep structure, parallel to the transactional vs transformational distinction explained above.

The most recent literature about the nature of organization change has been conceptualized by Weick and Quinn (1999), who stated that organization change follows two paths: episodic versus continuous change. The former refers to "infrequent, discontinuous, and intentional" organization change, arising from the seldom breaking of the organization inertial state, driven either by an external or internal event; the latter is described as "ongoing, evolving, and cumulative" (Burke, 2017), meaning ongoing and simultaneous adjustments implemented in different parts of the organization that lead to substantive change in the entire system, arising from an organization "alertness and inability to remain stable" (Burke, 2017) and it happens less frequently.

The analysis conducted highlights the complexity in categorizing organization change and dealing with employees' resistance to change. Thus, recognizing the type of change an organization is going through and its impact on the overall organization is necessary to design appropriate change management strategies and to ensure change success.

2.2 WHY DO ORGANIZATIONS CHANGE?

The journey in the achievement of the objective of this second chapter, that is demonstrating change management practices as necessary to ensure the success of any type of organization change, attempts to demonstrate the reason why organizations are inevitably subject to change and the driving factors of organization change, as well as to provide a theoretical framework as a basis for defining change management strategies.

2.2.1 ORGANIZATION DEFINED THROUGH OPEN-SYSTEM THEORY

The functioning of any human organization is explained in this paragraph as an open system by reporting Katz and Kahn’s (1978) contributions to open-system theory, arising from the field of cell biology. A human organization, just as a cell, is an open system since it requires continuous exchange of information and energy with the surrounding environment (e.g. the industry) for its survival. The functioning of the open system is cyclical and takes the form of an input-throughput-(transformation)-output process, through which energy flows. Energetic input includes raw materials, labor, sales, capital, resources taken from the external environment in general, which are internally processed and transformed into output – products or services - given back to the external environment. The output generates feedback, a source of information displaying the system’s relationship with the external environment, in the form of sales income for example, which functions as input and reactivates the system, perhaps leading to improved transformation processes and output, hence serving as basis for system change. The organization is characterized, thus, by these cycles of events which define its “permeable boundaries” (Burke, 2017), its identity. Katz and Kahn’s (1978) identified ten characteristics of open systems: “1) importation of energy; 2) throughput; 3) output; 4) systems as cycles of events; 5) negative entropy; 6) information input, negative feedback, and the coding process; 7) steady-state and dynamic homeostasis; 8) differentiation; 9) integration and coordination; 10) equifinality” (Burke, 2017).

Whilst the first characteristics have already been briefly explained above, let's focus on the most salient ones. As far as the concept of negative entropy is concerned, Katz and Kahn (1978) state: "the entropic process is a universal law of nature in which all forms of organization move toward disorganization and death…by importing more energy from its environment than it expends, the open system can store energy and acquire negative entropy" (Burke, 2017). Thus, the theorists suggest how an organization should acquire more energetic input than it expends to generate output, to ensure its survival. This information and energy acquisition process to manage entropy inevitably involves growth, development, differentiation and, thus, change of the system. Integration and coordination of the organization are ensured through shared values and norms, definition of roles and authority. For "steady-state" and "dynamic homeostasis" it is meant that organizations do not achieve a true equilibrium but a "steady-state" since they keep on moving through the cyclic flow of energy process in and out of the system. The concept of "equifinality" refers, instead, to the possibility to achieve the same organizational goal by adopting different solutions, beginning from variety of different points.

Moreover, open-system theory is broadened by more comprehensive system theories establishing a holistic view of the world, as an "integrated whole" rather than ensemble of disconnected parts, where each part of the system is "a pattern in an inseparable web of relationships" (Capra, 1996). It is possible to establish a parallelism between the physicist Capra's (1996) concept of "networks within networks" and the interdependency between an organization and the external environment. Capra (1996) individuates three concepts to understand the functioning of living systems: pattern, structure, and process. Pattern is "the configuration of relationships that determine the system's essential characteristics" (Burke, 2017) which will recognize and identify the system itself; at the organization level, pattern is what has been previously defined as "deep structure". Structure of a "living network" is "the embodiment of the system's physical components" (Burke, 2017) which is subject to the influence and influences the input and output coming from both the external and internal environment. Whilst structure is subject to change and the organization reacts to external perturbations differently, on the basis of its deep structure (e.g. organizational culture), the latter seldom changes, meaning that organizations respond to changes in their own unique but, most of the times, steady way. The third concept is process, which is “the activity involved in the continual embodiment of the system’s pattern of organization” (Burke, 2017), by activity Capra (1996) means the act of cognition - learning, feeling, perceiving, and acting. Acts of cognition are translated into structural changes that are what keeps the system alive and they are triggered by the system’s interaction with the external environment. In deciding which influences from the external environment should be addressed, the organization brings forth its pattern, therefore, organizational responses to change are unique. This oversimplified explanation, via Capra’s (1996) theory, of the interdependency between the organization and its external environment with which the organization interacts, by which it is influenced and influences in turn, answers the question of the reason why organizations inevitably change and need change to survive.

2.2.2 FACTORS INFLUENCING RESPONSIVENESS TO CHANGE: the Burke-Litwin causal model of organization performance and change

The focus of this last session of the second chapter is the Burke-Litwin “A causal model of organization performance and change”, which helps explaining the reason why organization change occurs, as well as change dynamics, the way in which change impacts on the various subsystems within the organization and the relevant factors influencing the organization’s responsiveness to such change; ultimately it provides for a basis to define appropriate change management strategies.

The Burke-Litwin model, dating back to the 80s, stems from Litwin and colleagues’ (1978) “Organizational-climate system” (Figure 1): a model depicting the organization climate at the center and establishing a cause-effect relationship between the organization climate, defined as the “set of psychological priorities of a given work environment that are based on collective perceptions of the people in that environment”

(Burke, 2017) and employees' motivation, affecting in turn employees' health and retention (needs) and organizational performance and development (tasks). The organizational climate is influenced by leadership and management styles, as well as by organizational culture (norms and values) and management systems (policies and procedures). Therefore, the model empirically proved that the climate of a work unit is the primary driver of employees' motivation, affecting employees' needs and tasks, hence, the better the organizational climate is, the higher the overall organizational performance.

The analysis of the Burke-Litwin model begins by commenting on its structure and by defining the individual variables, to further derive information and results that are relevant to the paper's objective.

The model (Figure 2) is constructed in line with the open-system's input-throughput-output concept, where the external environment serves as input to the system, the individual and organizational performance as output, and the remaining body of the system functions as throughput. The cyclic character of system's functioning is rendered through the two-sided feedback line, displaying how inputs from the external environment affect the organizational output and vice versa.

The throughout part of the model reflects the three previously described organizational dimensions - object of organizational change: the individual level depicted by "individual needs and values", "task requirements and individual skills" and "motivation"; the group-level with "climate"; and the large-system level with "mission and strategy", "leadership" and "organizational culture". Moreover, the multi-way arrows, connecting all the dimension boxes, establish causality among the system dimensions and show how a change occurring in any of them affects, eventually, the remaining of the system. However, the authors stress how the order in which the twelve boxes are positioned expresses different weighted influence on the overall system. In particular, the large-system level variables have a weightier influence on the overall system, and organizational change arises mostly from the external environment. The latter specification is necessary to plan and enact an efficient and effective change management strategy.

In addition, the model draws a distinction between transformational and transactional factors, defining, hence, the type of change they bring about, as well as the leadership style needed to handle it. Transformational factors include: “mission and strategy”, “leadership” and “organizational culture”. Changes in these categories are revolutionary and discontinuous, usually initiated from external inputs and, by changing the organization’s deep structure, they largely impact on the overall system and require transformational leadership to be successful – a leader that impersonates change and identifies with the organization’s new mission. On the other hand, transactional factors bring about evolutionary, continuous improvement type of changes and require managers who are motivated towards improvement and quality of operations to be successfully implemented.

By “external environment” the authors mean all those inputs affecting the organizational performance (i.e. output) such as financial and economic conditions, technology trends, political and governmental regulations, market and industry conditions, customer behavior and satisfaction. “Mission and strategy” refer to the purpose of the organization, what is that the organization is trying to accomplish, and the way in which the organization plans to accomplish its mission, respectively. “Leadership”, differentiated from “management practices”, embraces all the various levels within the organization and it is strictly related to the concept of providing direction to followers, embracing, and promoting change, influencing, guiding and persuading followers towards the achievement of a commonly accepted mission. “Culture” is the set of explicit and implicit (written and non-written) norms, rules and values that shape the organizational behavior and are rooted in the organization’s history. “Structure” refers to the way in which the system is organized to achieve its mission and enact its strategy:

the various organizational functions (e.g. accounting, finance, marketing, HRM) and the operational units, which define the decision-making power, responsibility and type of communication that the organization chooses to adopt. “Management practices” refer to the ensemble of behaviors managers adopt to achieve the organizational strategy. “Systems” embrace the ”policies and procedures” that support employees in their day-to-day operations, information systems and technology or compensation system for instance. “Climate” is exactly what has been previously presented in the early Litwin model. “Task requirements and individual skills/abilities” refers to the extent to which the job requirements, tasks, and responsibilities match with the employee’s abilities, skills, and know-how. The latter category, together with “individual needs and values”, which stands for the extent to which the individual needs and values are met on the job, strongly affects motivation. “Motivation” stems from the individual intention of satisfying certain needs such as the need for achievement, affiliation with others and power, which are reached by setting goals. Managers and change agents need, hence, to set appropriate goals that will give employees the chance to reach those needs, for them to be motivated. “Organizational and individual performance” affected by the external environment - the input, either directly or through the throughput categories, can be measured in a variety of ways as earnings per share, profit, productivity, innovation, or customer satisfaction, to mention a few.

Key to a comprehensive overview of the Burke-Litwin causal model of organization performance and change is the downward causality weighting of the twelve factors depicted in the model. Hence, it is important to understand that, for a planned change to be successfully implemented, certain factors have a higher influence on the overall system and ultimately on the organizational and individual performance. As stated before, the external environment causes the greatest input for organizational change. Within the organization, the model emphasizes the central role of leadership in directly shaping the organizational mission and strategy and partially organizational culture.

Change in these categories stems from the dynamics in the external environment, and it brings about further change in the transactional factors, lastly on the organizational performance.

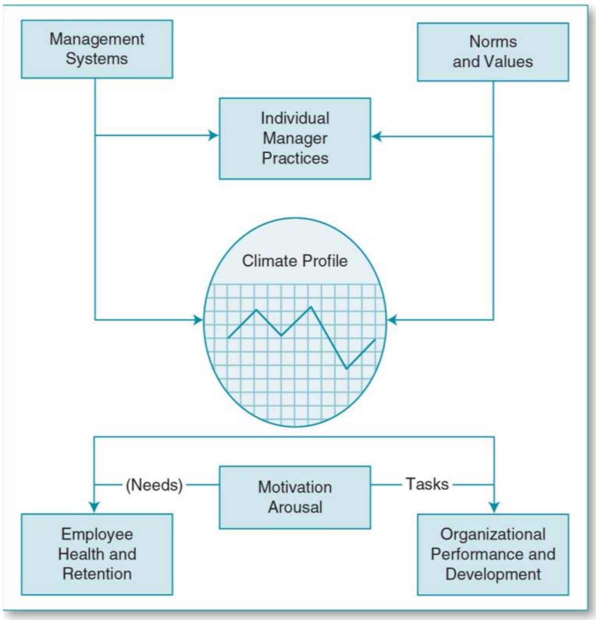

Figure 1
(Burke, 2017, p. 314)

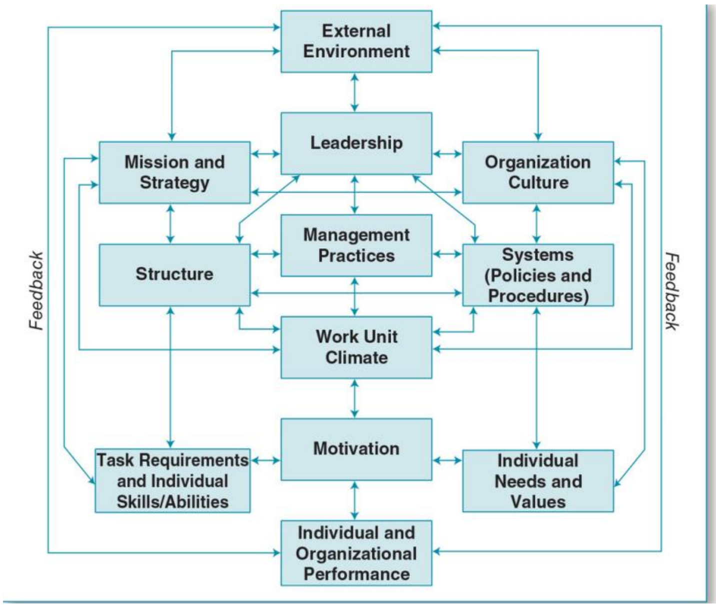

Figure 2
(Burke, 2017, p. 318)

3. LEADING ORGANIZATION CHANGE: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

This third chapter develops the core objective of this paper: providing for a critical analysis of a practical change management case, that is Accenture's change management methodology, by establishing a connection with theoretical models and concepts previously reported. Hence, with the aim of defining whether Accenture's change management methodology may or may not lead to successful implementation and adoption of organization change, what follows is a report of the variables to consider in the analysis. All of them constitute the theorical foundations of the Burke-Litwin model. A primary aspect to take into consideration is the alignment of the company's change management view with the open-system theory studied in the second chapter, meaning recognizing organization change as inevitable for a firm’s survival (i.e., as the means to manage entropy); as per Capra’s “networks within networks” concept, bearing in mind the interdependence between the organization and its external environment, valuing the input-throughput-output system as a process of mutual influence and interaction, which sets the basis for change, thus beholding change management as necessary to ensure change adoption.

A second variable is the identification of the type of change the client company wants to bring about, either transformational or transactional, at individual, group, or large-system level, with the aim of assessing possible employees’ responses to organization change and design appropriate activities to help dealing with them. Moreover, the change management team, in formulating appropriate strategies, should recall Kubler-Ross’ (1969) emotional journey through which individuals go (shock and denial, anger, bargaining or procrastinating, depression, acceptance) to tackle resistance to change. To this regard, the willingness and readiness of employees to organization change should be assessed, as well as the type of resistance they observe (blind, political, ideological) and the related common practices to overcome it, e.g. ensuring closure with past processes and habits to control employees’ sense of loss, participation to the planning and implementation of change to avoid the new situation being felt as an imposition, and establishment of superordinate goals requiring collaboration among organizational teams. The third factor under analysis is the extent to which the change management activities planned by the company ensure the appliance of Lewin’s three-phase model for change. As far as the model is concerned with its “unfreeze-movement-refreeze” stages, a change management plan should define appropriate practices for each of those phases, such as making employees aware of the need for change, interrupting the old way of conducting business; introducing the intended change; reinforcing the arisen new organizational state. Lastly, in line with the Burke-Litwin “causal model of organization performance and change” and its predecessor "organizational-climate system", a change management strategy should be focused on two relevant categories: organizational climate and leadership. Organizational climate has been identified as the driver of employees' motivation, which ultimately defines the effectiveness of individual and organizational performance, so the extent to which change is efficaciously embraced. Climate is influenced by various factors: leadership and management styles, organizational culture, as well as the alignment between individuals' needs and values (power, achievement, and affiliation) and the task requirements and individual skills/abilities. Therefore, a change management strategy should consider improving the organizational climate, setting new goals that allow employees to be able to achieve those needs, adopting the appropriate leadership style (transformational leadership vs transactional leadership), studying, and considering the strengths and the limitations of organizational culture vis-à-vis what is required to change. Leadership is, in fact, the key category in the Burke-Litwin model having the strongest weighted influence on all the other subsystems, ultimately on organizational performance.

3.1 A HUMAN-CENTERED APPROACH TO CHANGE: THE ACCENTURE S.p.A. CASE

The object of this analysis is to comment on the practical change management project upon which the researcher worked during the internship. It consisted of the definition and realization of a change management strategy and plan to support the implementation of a new information system, namely SAP 4/4 HANA, aimed at optimizing the Treasury Model and Intercompany cashflows among all the subsidiaries of one of the biggest Group players in the Energy sector.

3.1.1 A COMPANY OVERVIEW

The change management case that will be discussed in this paper is based on the activities and know-how learned during the internship at Accenture S.p.A., Milan, Italy. Accenture PLC is a multinational consulting company, based in Dublin, Ireland, which predominantly operates in the strategy consulting and outsourcing industries. Accenture combines technology and “human ingenuity” to offer innovative solutions to more than 7000 client firms in about 120 countries, with the aim of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of organizational and IT processes. Accenture conveys a span of services, such as application services, AI, automation, business strategy review, business process outsourcing, cloud, digital commerce, M&A, Metaverse, finance consulting, marketing, sustainability, and many more, to firms operating in 20 different industries, among which “Aerospace and defense”, “Banking”, “Energy”, Health”, “High tech”, “Communications and Media” and “Public Service”. In enacting its business strategy, Accenture promotes and guides its client firms through innovation and change, seen as a necessary requirement demanded by the fast-changing business world. Thus, the company recognizes that to guarantee the value realization of any type of proposed project, let it be a new business application like ERP or Information System like SAP, the offering of change management services is deemed as essential, since about 60% of companies fail to achieve their project objectives without appropriate user adoption strategies.

3.1.2 ANALYSIS OF ACCENTURE’S CHANGE MANAGEMENT METHODOLOGY

Accenture promotes the so-called Human-centered change management approach, declaring that any change success is due for the 20% to the technical quality of the software in case and for the 80% to employees’ acceptance and understanding of it. The human-centered approach implies a discovery-based understanding of impacted employees’ human side and needs, the definition of personalized change activities through the participative involvement of impacted employees, an iterative and agile approach in realizing change planned activities and adopting a “pull effect” by enabling impacted employees to feel owners of the change and part of the journey.

Accenture provides a wide span of services to help firms be on track with the fast-evolving business world, recognizing that the need for change may arise from external factors such as new legislation, new consumers trends, social and environmental trends, new technologies and data, competition, and new market entrants as well as from internal factors such as portfolio optimization, increased productivity or efficiency, mergers and acquisitions, digital transition. In doing so, Accenture not only recognizes the need for change but promotes it through its service offerings. Moreover, a change management offering is complementary to any type of other technical service conveyed to clients, and it is constructed upon the change type and occurrence that Accenture's service brings about. The goal is to guide end-users, who might experience denial, anger, sadness, disbelief, towards the final integration stage, through acceptance, experimentation, and search for meaning stages.

Hence, it is possible to positively evaluate the compliance with the first requirement of the critical analysis: recognizing change and change management strategy as necessary for a firm's survival, due to the interdependence between any organization and its surrounding environment.

The project developed during the internship experience concerned supporting the implementation, through change management activities, of a new information system, SAP S/4 HANA, optimizing the Treasury model and Intercompany cashflows of many subsidiaries, hence, it is regarded as a transactional (or evolutionary) type of change which, even though of large-scale, does not affect the "deep structure" of the organizations in question.

The change management approach followed eight stages attempting to place the impacted employees at the center focus: 1) Defining vision and path; 2) Discovering the change audience; 3) Identifying change impact; 4) Defining change journey; 5) Defining change network; 6) Creating personalized communications; 7) Setting up the training plan; 8) Sustaining and monitoring change. The definition of these eight stages, which are not to be followed in sequential order, is aimed at guiding the impacted client employees through their change journey from awareness, through understanding, acceptance, to commitment to change. The analysis of the methodology continues with a description of each of these eight elements based on the researcher's experience - their purpose and the main deliverables they include – followed by a critical comment considering the theoretical criteria listed above.

One of the first actions undertaken to set a change management strategy was to 1) define change vision and path, which entails : the definition of a holistic overview of the client's project, understanding the change's scale, scope, type, and magnitude; and the creation of a change vision statement as a brief, clear, motivating statement that communicates the change initiative and inspires the organization to change, answering to questions as "why, what and how change is happening", the latter is then validated and communicated to project sponsor and client leadership, who must be committed to it. During this step a change governance plan with change roles and responsibilities, decision-making power rights and processes, is defined to ensure the smoothness of the subsequent change management activities. Moreover, during this stage data on the change capability and readiness of the client organization is collected through various tools (e.g., interviews, surveys, focus groups) from identified stakeholders, and it addresses questions related to "deep structure" dimensions such as leadership, organizational culture, and organizational structure and skills as well. The latter serves to understand the client impacted employees' motivation, organizational climate, and type of resistance to change, in turn to define appropriate change management strategies to tackle barriers to change. A detailed change roadmap is as well defined, containing the change activities and key milestones that need to take place in compliance with the project timeline.

The objective of the 2) discovery of the change audience stage is to identify all the key stakeholders (i.e., individuals and groups with an interest in the project's success), their needs, roles, and challenges that they might face, in order to design customized change management activities (e.g., communication and training) and to define how to differently keep them engaged through customized change journeys. The main deliverables of this stage are the development of a stakeholder map and target change personas. Key to this stage is the identification of the various stakeholder groups based on their involvement in the change implementation, the way they are going to be impacted by change, their interest in the success of the project, and their information needs. The latter is done in order to recognize the following clusters of stakeholders: sponsors and leadership who require to be aligned and fully informed about the project; change ambassadors (e.g. key users of the new information system) who are going to promote and help implement the change within the organization, hence, they are involved in the design of the change activities; end-users who are the recipients of change, who need to embrace change and learn the functioning of the new information system; third-parties and partners with whom the client, as well as Accenture's change management team need to collaborate. Target change personas are selected cluster of stakeholders that are going to be mostly impacted or influence the adoption to change and need to be further analyzed. The change management team realizes change personas recognizing the role, the needs, the main responsibilities, the pain points of cluster of employees, through qualitative research methods such as meeting interviews that help the team empathize with these stakeholders and later define customized change journeys. Change personas are then validated with the client lead and representatives of the clusters.

Complementary to this stage is the 3) identification of change impact on the different groups of stakeholders in terms of process, people, and technology as they move from the as-is to the to-be state. The latter, together with change risk assessment, contributes to the definition of the most suitable types of change activities (i.e., communication and training) to be conveyed. Change risk assessment helps Accenture's change management team identifying and managing the possible barriers to a successful implementation of change such as resistance, lack of awareness, lack of desire to support change, lack of leadership support, lack of resources, and those risks are organized in terms of their nature, the level of risk, their owners, and the mitigation techniques. The realization of the change risk assessment is built upon the change impact analysis and the stakeholder analysis and on meetings with the targeted stakeholder clusters to further assess and validate change related risks.

4) Change journeys are defined for each identified target persona by using the previously mentioned activities as input. Change journeys display on a timeline all the customized communication and training activities Accenture delivers as well as key project milestones (e.g., go-live of the information system), to ensure stakeholders are optimally engaged in the change process, and to favor their adoption.

One of the most important steps is 5) the definition of the change network, meaning the identification of change ambassadors, employees from different areas of the client organization that act as leaders of change by establishing a link between the project team and the end-users. The objective of change ambassadors is to champion the change vision, to favor the understanding of the need for change within the organization, to encourage engagement and tackle resistance. In order to do so, change ambassadors are made aware, engaged and trained by Accenture through targeted communications, workshops, and training sessions; in fact, change ambassadors need to understand the whole project and its impact, they need to be proactive in the participation to the definition of change activities, they help spotting resistance and defining methods to tackle it, they sometimes train and provide support to end-users once the system has gone live, and they provide and look for internal feedback. Accenture change management team, once identified the change ambassadors, realizes ad-hoc communication, workshops, followed by technical training on the functioning of the new information system, which explain and demonstrate the key role change ambassadors are going to play. Accenture provides for useful tips and tools to lead change internally and stresses the importance of being enthusiastic and committed to the change, showing empathy and great communication skills, being able to provide feedback and spot resistance, be seen as trustable by other employees, having the necessary technical skills to comprehend change.

From an operational point of view, the guidance of stakeholder groups through the awareness, understanding, acceptance and commitment to change phases, is obtained via 6) targeted communication and 7) training solutions. The change management team designs and develops a communication plan displaying all the communications, customized in terms of key messages, key information, delivery channels, objectives, and time frequency, based on the change personas and change impact analysis. Communication materials include awareness meetings, videos, PowerPoint slides, newsletters, pre go-live, go-live and post go-live e-cards, banners and infographics, and post go-live promotional videos, each aimed at increasing awareness, building commitment, engaging the target audience to ensure its adoption of change. The content of those communications is shaped upon the different emotional stages experienced by individuals when impacted by change, and as a common line they need to transparently convey the change vision, the benefits and the advantages of change, the added value of change for the target audience, the way in which the target audience will be impacted and the various activities that are upcoming for them, and they usually adopt a positive, fun, direct, and engaging style. In line with its iterative and agile working style, the change management team assesses the target audience reaction to such communications with the aim of implementing changes to subsequent communication materials.

The formulation of the learning plan starts with the assessment of the required skills and gaps between the current and future state of each impacted stakeholder group to handle the new changed processes, resulting from the implementation of the new information system. All the different learning materials are designed and created, in collaboration with change lead and change ambassadors with the aim of enacting a customized, flexible, all-time, informal, and collaborative learning. The blended learning solution consisted in a mix of training sessions – both direct training of end-users and train the trainer method (Accenture provides frontal training sessions to change ambassadors who will in turn teach end-users) – tutorial and process videos aimed at illustrating the key objectives, advantages, and changed processes of the new solution at different detail levels, induction booklet with manuals and PowerPoint slides illustrating the functioning of the new IS in detail, coffee breaks to gather feedback and measure effectiveness and FAQ, all of them accessible at all time.

Both the communication and training deliverables are included in the change journey timeline of each target change persona (i.e., cluster of stakeholders).

In order to 8) sustain and monitor change impact, the change management team identifies KPIs, user adoption (e.g., change adoption survey), business specific (e.g., cycle time for processes) and system specific metrics (e.g., completion of tasks on time with the new system), as well as their scheduling, to eventually take corrective actions and modify change journeys on-the-go.

Once the Accenture's change management methodology has been concisely explained, it is now possible to evaluate its strengths and weaknesses following the previously identified theoretical criteria.

As far as the identification of the type of change and change impact (e.g. resistance to change) criteria is concerned, the methodology stresses the importance of defining the type, scope, and scale of change in the first stage described, and dedicates a whole stage to the evaluation of change impact on the various clusters of stakeholders having the change management team produce change impact assessment and change risk assessment which includes both risks in terms of attitudes of impacted client employees and internal change management team risks, and action plans on how to avoid or mitigate them. Moreover, Kubler-Ross' five emotional stages experienced by individuals impacted by change are a common and constant factor to all the methodology's stages, since each change management activity (i.e., communication, training) is thought to target a specific emotional stage and adoption stage (e.g., awareness meeting to raise awareness, pre-go live and video process to understand the change and personal role in it and so on). In addition, the direct, fun, clear, informative, engaging communication style, as well as its frequency and channels are planned in such a way to make end-users understand and feel part of the change with the aim of tackling resistance to change and accelerating adoption. Moreover, the awareness meetings and the very first customized communication materials are meant to lead the various groups of stakeholders to comprehend the need for change, the goal and advantages of the new solution, their different roles in the change journey and to start achieving closure with past procedures, in that it is possible to recognize the "closure and participation" theoretical tactics to counteract resistance to change. Therefore, one of strengths of the model relates to the fact that each stage and deliverable is "human-centered" since it is based on the emphatic understanding of the different impacted stakeholders' needs, roles, pain points, through contact with internal stakeholders and qualitative and quantitative research methods (i.e., surveys, interviews, focus groups). However, a first critique to the methodology is the weak direct participative role of end-users to the planning and formulation of change activities. In fact, whilst change ambassadors participate to almost all stages by providing and receiving feedback and are fully informed on the WIP of the project, end-users could be further included and assist to the decision-making process since the goal is for the change adoption to occur within the ultimate, every-day users of the new information system.

Through the description of Accenture's methodology, it is possible to positively evaluate the central importance given to leadership in enhancing motivation and ensuring change adoption, which reflects the suggested strategy of the Burke-Litwin model. In fact, in the change network definition stage, the change management team individuates those employees that may act as change ambassadors for the rest of the subunit to which they belong. Change ambassadors receive extensive training on the change management methodology adopted and technical training on the functioning of the new system and participate to the decision-making activities and deliverables, so that they achieve a deep understanding of the need for change, their key role, and the way they can internally lead change at best to ensure adoption. To this regard, change ambassadors are instructed on the key communicative styles and on the importance of setting goals for the impacted end-users, the latter can be linked to Burke-Litwin suggested strategy of setting goals to ensure the alignment between individuals' needs and values (power, achievement, and affiliation) and the task requirements and individual skills/abilities, affecting motivation. Therefore, the methodology recognizes the importance of leadership as one of the variables affecting organizational climate, driver of employees' motivation and in turn of individual and organizational performance. Despite this, organizational climate depends on a series of other background variables, as the Burke-Litwin model explains, such as organizational culture and management practices of extreme relevance in shaping the everyday behavior and attitude of employees, which, except for an initial evaluation during the definition of vision and path stage, are not extensively taken into consideration. In conclusion, taking the Litwin's three-phase model for change into consideration, a major critique may be levied on the methodology. In fact, if the change management team is concentrated on designing and implementing change activities up to the immediate post go-live of the new information system moment, corresponding to the "movement phase" in Litwin's model, no activities are planned for the "refreezing phase", necessary to lock-in the new changed organizational state. Therefore, the risk related to the lack of change support once the new system has been implemented, is that of having employees, as well as change leaders, resorting to old habits, resisting, rejecting, or disregarding the advantages of the new solution. Moreover, the sustainment and monitoring of change measures are concentrated on the "unfreezing" and "movement" phases of the model with the aim of correcting change management actions immediately before and right after the actual information system has gone live, thus there is no clear and certain measuring of the users' adoption rate after a certain amount of time has elapsed.

3.2 DISCUSSION

This last chapter is centered on the researcher's personal considerations of Accenture's change management methodology in light of the critical analysis. The value-added of the human-centered approach adopted has, as its name stands, the central focus on people, which leads the change management team to empathize with the impacted employees in the practical creation of all the communication and training deliverables. The latter entails asking oneself what is the key message that needs to be conveyed given the specific characteristics of the target stakeholder group in question. Moreover, the delivery of customized communication and training, from the aesthetic design to the wording to the timing, follows marketing-related strategies for engagement and adoption which increase the chance of employees' commitment. A positive evaluation is also given to the agile and innovative (in the type of change deliverables such as videos, slides, newsletters and more) implementation of change, introduced gradually and through a clear, positive campaign having the set vision always upfront. The interaction and participation of both change ambassadors and end-users need to be further exploited. In fact, on the one hand, given the importance of engaged and active leadership and management practices on employees' motivation, change ambassadors may be identified in the early stages of the project, before any meeting is organized with the rest of the impacted employees. In this way, change ambassadors can further understand the reason, the objectives and goals of change and present them, together with the change management team, during the first awareness meetings directed to end-users. In addition, there is the need to evaluate whether change ambassadors are going to actually implement what has been taught them during customized workshops and training meetings, both in the training sessions directed to end-users and in the everyday business activities following the go-live, thus, for instance, one could organize test training sessions to provide change ambassadors with feedback on the methodology adopted. In conclusion, the lack of follow-up change efforts plays a major obstacle in the ensuring an effective positive adoption of change, therefore additional change activities and measuring of change need to be implemented to enact Litwin's "refreezing phase", after some time has elapsed from the go-live of the system.

4. CONCLUSION

Change, whether evolutionary or revolutionary, happening at individual, group, or large-system level, continuous or discontinuous, is necessary and vital to any organization existence. The theorical and practical journey exploring the theory of organization change and change management has attempted to consider organizational changes as means to manage the entropic process in which the organization, regarded as a cyclic input-throughput-output open-system, resides. Accordingly, change, growth and evolution are consequences of the needed process of acquiring more inputs (e.g., capital, labor) than the organization expends to generate its output (e.g., products and services), from the external environment in which the organization exists, by which it is continuously influenced and influences in turn. The need for change primarily arises from feedbacks (e.g., customer satisfaction, income sales) stemming from the external environment which reactivates the organizational cyclic system, the output of which impacts on those feedbacks and on the external environment as well. However, whether paramount, embracing change is not a straightforward task, and this is where change management practices come to hand. Change management strategies are aimed at recognizing the type, scope and scale of organizational changes and managing the resulting individual and group responses to such changes. To this regard, several theoretical studies such as Kubler-Ross' five-emotional stages, Brehm's "Psychological Reactance", Litwin's three-phase model, Litwin's "Climate-organizational model" and others, are aimed at finding causes and/or solutions for individual and group resistance

to change – main responsible for change failure - to ensure change adoption. The Burke-Litwin's "A causal model of organization performance and change", based upon all the theoretical discoveries presented so far, provides for an explanatory framework of the way change occurs and influences an organization. As emerged, the primary driver for motivation – which defines individual and organizational performance, hence change success - is organizational climate, influenced by leadership, organizational culture, management practices and the alignment among individual values and needs and tasks requirements. The study of the model, displaying twelve factors in ever increasing weighted influence on organizational performance (i.e., change success), defined the theoretical background for the critical analysis of the consulting company Accenture S.p.A. change management methodology, which the researcher has acknowledged during the internship experience. Various variables have been pinpointed to evaluate the "human-centered" approach adopted at Accenture: recognition of the importance of a well-thought and phased change management strategy, differentiation of changes, study of their organizational impact, predominance of leadership, central focus on individuals' motivation to name a few. As emerged from the critical analysis, the key strength of the methodology is the empathic discovery-based change management approach, which entails planning agile and customized change activities (e.g., communication, training) which always bear the different stakeholders' roles, needs, and pain points in mind.
Empathy and engaging, positive, fun, direct and clear communicative style are also some of the key characteristics taught to "change ambassadors", those among the clients' employees in charge of leading change, representing how leadership is on the spotlight. A major critique arises, however, due to the lack of continuity of change efforts after the Go-live of Accenture's service offering (i.e., a new information system), which prevents "refreezing" the new changed practices and behaviors and reduces the chance of real change commitment.

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