

Managing Change: Steering a Course between Intended Strategies and Unanticipated Outcomes

Julia Balogun

It is well known that managed change within an organisation can result in unpredictable outcomes. In this paper a sensemaking framework is developed to demonstrate how both intended and unintended outcomes can result from the way middle managers – who are usually the recipients of a change strategy devised at the top – make sense of the senior management initiatives. This framework highlights the significant impact of change recipients on the outcomes achieved and suggests we need to reconsider both what we mean by “managing” change, and the way senior managers lead change. A case study that looks at a privatised utility undergoing strategic change from a middle manager perspective illustrates how the framework can account for the phenomenon of unintended outcomes. As the implementation largely follows what could be described as a textbook, top-down approach to change, it illustrates the problems many organisations face when implementing such change programmes. The paper also draws out the implications for the practice of change management.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Introduction

Planned programmes of change can often lead to unanticipated outcomes and unintended consequences.¹ In fact, the frequent failure of organisational change programmes to deliver against their intended aims is broadly acknowledged, with some researchers quoting failure rates of up to 70 per cent.² This has led to a growing number of prescriptive approaches to the design of change aimed at improving success rates: such as acknowledging the role of both hard (economic) and soft (more interpersonal) interventions, making change context-sensitive, holistic and follow some basic rules and guidelines.³ While all of these prescriptions contain useful advice for managers, none deals

directly with the issue of *how* unanticipated outcomes arise once planned programmes of change are underway and, therefore, what, if anything, can be done about it. This is the purpose of this paper.

Research typically examines change only from the perspective of senior managers, with change recipients often viewed as resistant, foot-dragging saboteurs.⁴ This view is not helpful in understanding how senior management plans are translated down the line. This lack of attention to the role of others in change has led few to challenge the implication often given in literature that if enough attention is paid to planning, change implementation can be “managed” in a top-down fashion with new practices falling naturally out of senior manager edict.

This paper, with its focus on strategic transformation from a middle manager perspective, shows that senior management control over outcomes is tenuous because of the way change recipients edit senior management plans. It focuses on the links between recipient cognition and the unpredictable nature of strategic change to show how the outcome is influenced by the way change recipients make sense of the strategy. Change can be like an old slot machine, where a penny placed in the top can take many different paths so that you can’t know in advance what you will get out at the bottom. Similarly, senior managers cannot foretell the impact of interventions they initiate from the top as recipient interpretations are only partly influenced by senior manager plans and actions. Recipients are equally, if not more, influenced by the lateral and largely informal processes of communication between themselves in their day to day work.

These findings suggest that we need to reconceive the way we approach the management of top-down change in organisations. From the perspective this paper adopts, understanding change involves understanding which intended and unintended messages have been received, how the messages have been interpreted and why, and how these meanings are affecting behaviour. “Managing” change is then an active and ongoing process as much to do with aligning the understanding between senior managers and others as with the deployment and monitoring of actions. Assumptions of senior manager control over change need to be replaced with recognition of the role of change recipients in *creating* change. The emphasis on formal, top-down communications and interventions needs to be balanced with efforts by senior managers to engage more actively with those lower down in organisations, and particularly middle managers, to forge a shared idea of what needs to be achieved. Change leaders also need to be prepared to live the changes they want others to adopt.

This paper first discusses the emergent nature of change in organisations, and then presents a framework which illustrates how a sensemaking perspective can enable us to explain unanticipated change outcomes and show how these outcomes develop. The validity of the framework is illustrated through a series of vignettes on unanticipated outcomes drawn from a case study on the top-down implementation of strategic change in a utility. Finally, the paper discusses the implications of the findings for the way we think about the management of change.

Change as an emergent process

It is generally accepted that strategic change is a context-dependent, unpredictable process, in which intended strategies lead to both intended and unintended outcomes.⁵ Change is not only dynamic, emergent and non-linear, but also frustrating and daunting.⁶ Best-laid plans frequently go wrong (see Figure 1). Interventions can produce unanticipated outcomes – both *reinforcing* outcomes consistent with the direction of change desired by the designers, such as staff showing more commitment than anticipated to making the changes work, and *counteracting* outcomes not supportive of the desired direction of change. Well-meaning gestures, such as a genuine attempt to be open and honest in communication about the uncertainties facing an organisation, for example, may be interpreted as the senior managers not having clear plans and contribute to cynicism of their role. Such unanticipated and unintended outcomes can become serious and derail the change programme, through for example, ritualisation of culture change or a hijacked process.⁷

Despite the well-documented existence of unintended and disruptive outcomes in programmes of change, let alone the poor success rate of change programmes to deliver against intended objectives, top-down change programmes remain the norm for many organisations. There remains an

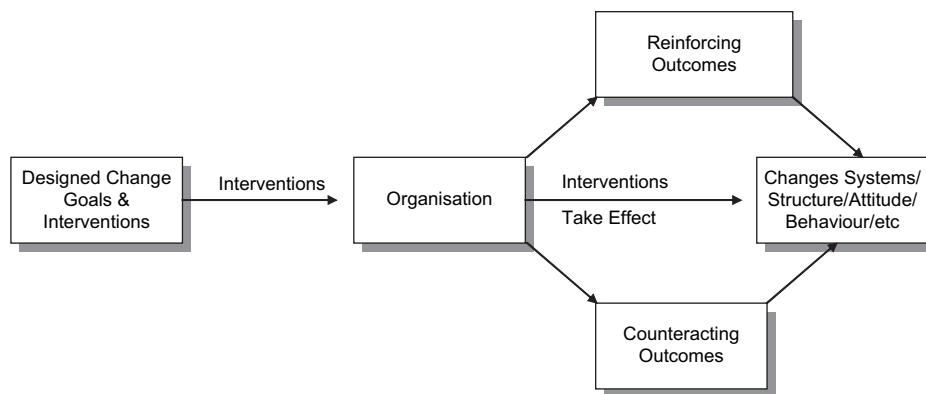


Figure 1. Processes of change and unintended outcomes

assumption that carefully-developed plans will deliver the expected results – and that the solution to unanticipated outcomes is more and better planning. This may be due to the fact that diagrams such as Figure 1 don't explain *why* unintended consequences arise, and *why* planned changes are derailed. This paper therefore adopts a “sensemaking” perspective to provide an explanation of how unintended consequences develop, and what this tells us about our assumptions about planned change.

Change is not only dynamic, emergent and non-linear, but also frustrating and daunting

A sensemaking perspective on change

If we are to understand better how middle managers, and change recipients in general, respond to the top-down strategies of their seniors, we need to examine their sensemaking processes. For organisational change to succeed, it must involve a shift in the shared assumptions and beliefs about why events in an organisation happen as they do and how people act in different situations. These assumptions may include things such as acceptable management styles, ways of interacting with customers, ways of working within teams and so on. A shift in these shared beliefs requires a shift in individuals' schemata – the mental maps or memory models that individuals have about their organisation.

During times of stability, therefore, individuals respond in a largely preprogrammed, almost taken-for-granted way to events occurring around them leading to co-ordinated actions and behaviours (see Figure 2a). During times of change, however, such ways of behaving are likely to break down – people have to adopt new job roles, new technology, new working practices and so on. Behaviour has to become less preprogrammed and more considered, although at the same time individuals seek to re-establish shared patterns of behaviour and return to more stable working practices. Individuals have to move to a more conscious sensemaking mode to assess what is going on around them (see Figure 2b).⁸

During change, related initiatives, activities and events which individuals cannot understand through their existing schemata act as *sensemaking triggers*. Individuals move to the more conscious sensemaking mode to make sense of the differences they are experiencing, typically by sharing their experiences with others. Individuals do this by engaging in a variety of *social processes of interaction*. These everyday social interactions include communication, both written and spoken, formal and informal, such as discussions, negotiations, stories, gossip and rumours. They also include physical signals, such as behaviours and actions.⁹

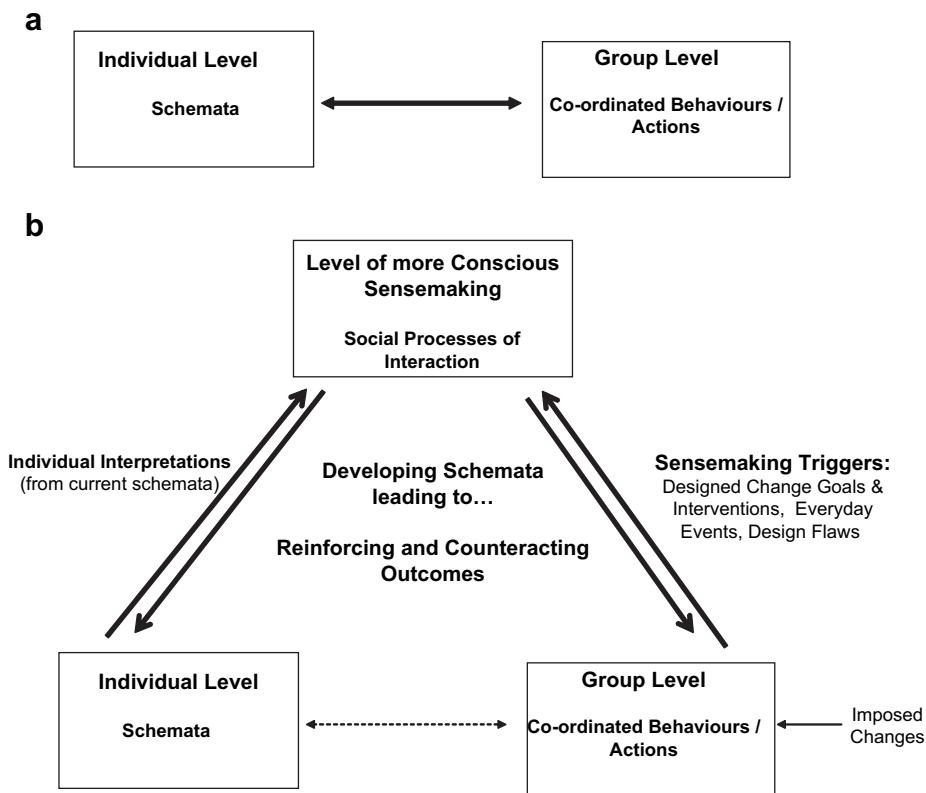


Figure 2. a: Sensemaking during times of stability, b: Sensemaking during times of change

Through these interactions individuals try to make sense of the event or behaviour that triggered the conscious sensemaking and then act on the basis of their interpretation. From such a perspective intended and unintended change outcomes, both those that facilitate and hinder the intended change direction, can be explained in terms of the interpretations that recipients develop of the change interventions. Subsequently, the behaviours and actions people engage in as a result of their interpretations feed back in as further sensemaking triggers. This cyclical sensemaking process continues until new common ways of working are developed and ways of interacting once more become taken for granted.

The model in Figure 2 highlights how it is not just the formal interventions that need to be considered during change, but also the informal, everyday communications that occur within an organisation. We need to focus on how individuals are making sense of things and why. We now use this framework to examine some vignettes about unanticipated outcomes and explain how and why they occur. First, the broader research project from which the vignettes are drawn is described.

Explaining unanticipated outcomes: the role of recipient interpretations

The research site was a privatised utility, Utilco, undergoing changes in response to new regulatory pressures in the mid-1990s. A strategic review of the core business led the senior managers to conclude that the organisation had to be radically re-engineered and new ways of working put in place if it was to remain profitable. A review group of consultants and senior managers from Utilco developed a blueprint for a new structure and ways of working. The old group was restructured into three new divisions: a much smaller core division employing about 300 of the original 3,500-plus staff; and two service divisions, Engineering and Services, which were to provide support activities on a contract basis (see Figure 3). The core division

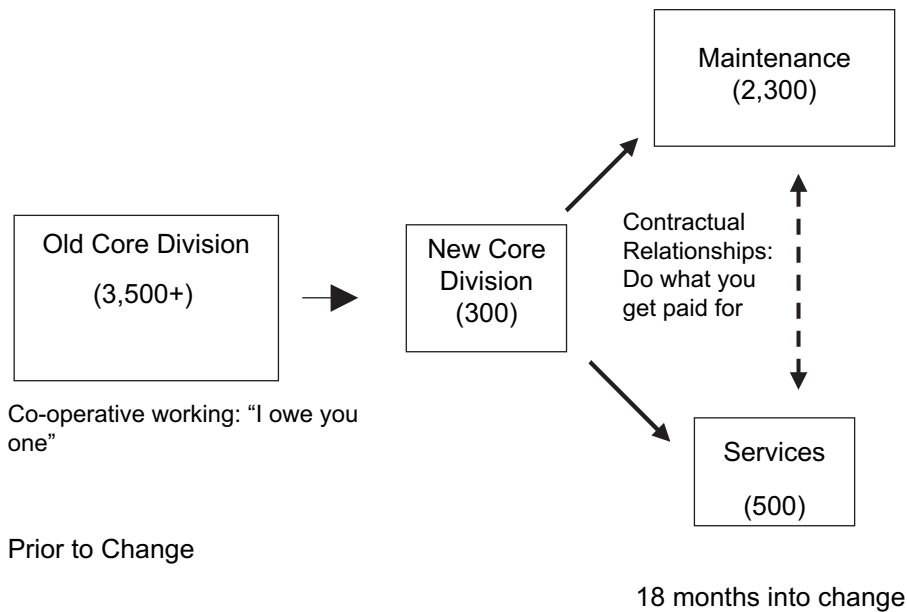


Figure 3. The new structure

was to be responsible for the strategic development of the business and act as the central customer contact point. Engineering was responsible for the maintenance and construction of organisational assets. Services was responsible for the delivery of customer services. This all required a fundamental restructuring of the business and the development of new working practices, procedures and systems. As part of the restructuring, the business was downsized, aided by the introduction of more flexible working practices and new technology. The aim of the contracts with the Engineering and Services divisions was to provide greater cost transparency: ultimately, if the service divisions failed to provide adequate levels of service at adequate costs, contracts could be outsourced.

Implementation started in April following the appointment of three divisional directors and each division's senior management team. The implementation followed a classic consultant-led, top-down planned change programme. The main focus for the first couple of months was the appointment of staff. The old structure was moved to the new structure on a level by level basis and at each stage the staff that would be offered positions in the new structure were selected, and redundancies also identified. Staff attended briefings which explained the positions available and were "counselled" so they could express their preferences. At appointments staff were recounselled to explain what position they had been given. The aim was to have all staff in place in the new structure by November. The main co-ordination mechanism during the transitional period was "business as usual". This meant that staff and departments would continue to do the work they used to do until whichever department was to be responsible for that work in the new structure was ready to take over. To ensure staff understood the purpose and rationale of the strategy, in July all staff attended roadshows at which a video explained the changes and staff had the opportunity to ask questions, and received a comprehensive team brief on the progress of the changes. "Vision workshops" on the rationale for change and the new structure and ways of working were also put in place for all staff.

The research tracked the progress of the change implementation from the perspective of the middle managers across all three divisions for a period of about a year, dating from the point at which they took up their appointments in the new structure in June/July. Middle managers were asked to maintain diaries of their change experiences. [Text Box 1](#) details the research approach and more details are provided in [Appendix A](#).

Text Box 1.

Research Approach

The research design focused on collecting data from middle managers across the three new divisions at Utilco. Some 26 middle managers, selected from all key departments and interfaces in the new structure, maintained diaries of how they saw the changes progressing. Each middle manager had a printed diary split into fortnightly time periods. Each time period contained five questions: what is going well and why; what is going badly and why; what problems do you foresee; what have been the significant events; and what rumours are circulating. The middle managers filled these diaries every fortnight and then faxed the diary sheets to the researcher for inclusion in the research database. The three appointed divisional change managers also maintained diaries. Maintenance of the diaries was reduced to a monthly basis as the progress of change slowed.

Regular contact was maintained with the diarists through short telephone interviews and at review meetings. However, the research involved multiple methods of data collection. All diarists were interviewed at the start and end of the research. Change-related documentation was collected. Towards the end of the research, the diarists attended focus groups to provide feedback on their perceptions of the progress of change. In return for research access, the researcher provided regular progress reports for the directors based on the middle manager feedback.

The overall change plans in the first year were to restructure the business, appoint staff, introduce changes to working practices and develop contracts. In the second year the contracts were to be operated as ghost contracts, becoming fully functional at the start of the third year. However, early into the change process a number of unanticipated outcomes, both helpful and unhelpful, arose. The positive outcomes included an emergent culture change and staff adaptation within the Core division, and the division's attempts to create productive working relationships between the new divisions. Others were unhelpful, such as tensions and unco-operative working relationships between the new divisions, protection of turf, prolonged "business as usual", lack of shift to a more empowered culture in the Engineering and Services divisions and false expectations of the review group output. The following vignettes describe some of these.

Vignette 1: Culture change in the Core division

The aim of culture change within Utilco was to shift to a commercial, customer-focused and flexible culture from a traditional, hierarchical, technical, job for life culture. However, as this culture change did not seem to be occurring, the directors initiated a values and behaviours programme for the three divisions as change moved into the second year. Yet the Core division middle managers believed that even without this initiative a culture change – although not necessarily the one planned – was occurring within their division and swapped stories about this: "*When I first came it was the old regime and there was a lot of politics... what I see this team doing, is being very businesslike and trying to achieve things they need to do, so I see people hitting targets and producing action plans and expecting to have a performance review, expecting to hit targets.*" (Core division, middle manager.)

There was a move to a more open, approachable and less blame/control style of management with greater autonomy, whereas in the Service divisions the blame/control culture remained – "*well we have got a blame culture, even if it was his fault*", (Engineering, Middle Manager) – with little evidence of empowerment, and decisions made locally countermanded from above.

The adaptation of Core division middle manager to new roles and responsibilities, which involved them in developing their own job parameters instead of performing to fixed job descriptions, played a part in this. Initially, the middle managers were disorientated as they had assumed that the

review group would produce detailed outlines of job roles and responsibilities with clearly-defined boundaries between departments and divisions. However, as the middle managers tried working with the review group output and each other, they discovered that they had to develop and negotiate the details of the job roles themselves. As they approached the end of the first year of the implementation they were able to appreciate the extent of change that had been required of them: *“The amount of change we have gone through, actually that is something that I think has gone incredibly well... My job description is totally different to what it was in June, and that is not just in our section, you can see it across where ever.”* (Core division, middle manager.)

Explaining Culture Change in the Core Division

The sensemaking perspective shown in Figure 2b helps to explain how emergent culture change developed through the focus it places

- (1) on the impact of existing schemata on interpretations of change interventions; and
- (2) on the way these interpretations and therefore actions are subsequently shaped and changed through both formal and informal social interaction.

In the early days of change middle managers had assumed that this initiative would be much like the many other restructuring programmes they had experienced. They had examined the implications within the context of their old mental models in which restructuring equalled little fundamental change. Similarly, they had false expectations of the review group output. Staff were *“coming from that culture where they’ve been cradle to grave told exactly what to do, there was no empowerment.”* (Core division, director.) They assumed they would be handed detailed role specifications, but they weren’t (see Figure 4).

Although staff struggled to come to terms with the changes and their new job roles initially, culture change was facilitated by many informal social interactions. The middle managers noticed, and then discussed, shared and interpreted through stories and gossip, many positive sensemaking triggers emanating from their director and his behaviour. From early on the Core division director’s style was seen as different from other senior managers within the utility. For example: *“The director came across as honest, open and totally committed to the success of the business”*. (Core division, middle manager.) There were also many initiatives from the director in response to staff concerns in the progress reports from the researcher over issues such as the planned staff move to a new centralised office, the customer service centralisation, and “who does what”. For example, in response to negative rumours about a lack of accommodation at the new office, a communications team was set up to inform staff of their relocation details, arrange pre-move office visits and co-ordinate the move. In response to the concerns over “who does what”, a Core division directory was produced. The level of response to the diary issues was seen as significant, with discussion about this: *“We’ve never been able to talk directly to the director before, it just would never have happened, it would have got filtered at my level or the level above.”* (Core division, middle manager.) Such discussion counteracted the old culture of “don’t pass bad news upwards”.

Staff noticed and shared many positive sensemaking triggers emanating from exemplary senior manager behaviour

Following the completion of the move to the centralised office halfway through the first year of change, further change was facilitated by more social interaction – again primarily informal. Yet again, the staff noticed and shared many positive sensemaking triggers emanating from exemplary senior manager behaviour. For example, the director’s solution to a parking problem at the new office was to abolish reserved parking places for senior managers and replace this with parking

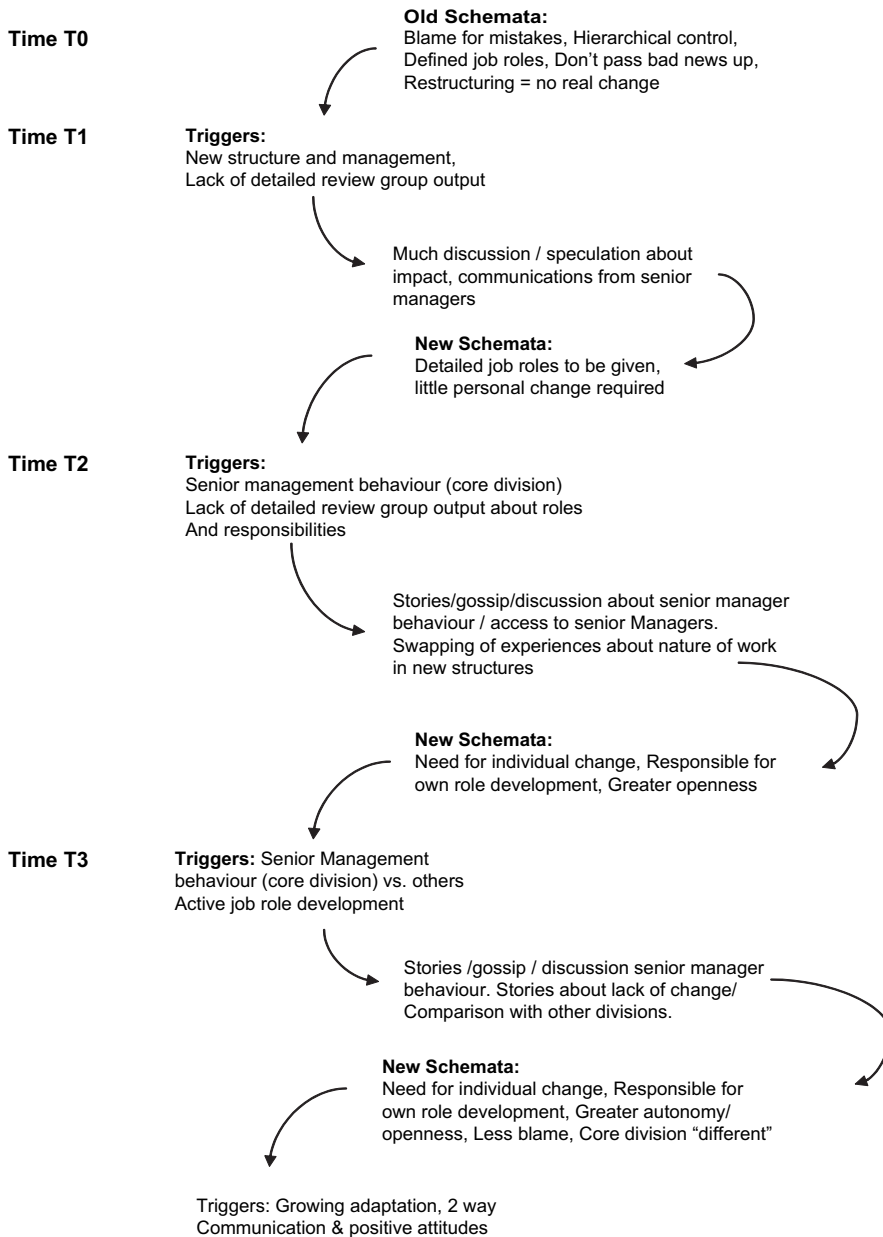


Figure 4. Core division culture change and adaptation

on a first-come-first-served basis. The director himself set an example by always parking away from the offices even though he regularly arrived at work at 6.30am. Stories and discussions about these behaviours were a contrast to the stories circulating about the lack of response to staff issues, a lack of movement to greater empowerment and the continuation of the blame/control culture in the service divisions. Through the sharing of these positive experiences in the Core division (and lack of shared negative experiences), and discussion about how the nature of work had changed, staff in the Core division developed interpretations that there was less of a blame/control culture in the division, with more individual autonomy, greater openness and more two-way communication. For example: *“We have had quite a rude awakening this year, the extent of the change in the way the business has run has been phenomenal. We could never have imagined it... there is no parameter, you have got to be so flexible to survive.”* (Core division, middle manager.)

Vignette 2: Interdivisional tensions

Throughout the implementation, middle manager diaries contained extensive entries on the development of a “them and us situation” between the Core division and the other two divisions. Interdivisional tensions were appearing with a sense of competition rather than co-operation: “*Soon it may get like with transfer pricing – no one prepared to do anyone a favour and a decrease in goodwill.*” (Core division, middle manager.) Some Core division diarists condemned this attitude, saying of others: “*They need a kick. Some bull-headed managers need to get their heads out of the sand and start working for the business overall.*” (Core division, middle manager.) However, individuals in the other divisions were equally robust in their criticism of the Core division. For example, a manager in Engineering commented: “*It is not rumours, it is fact. You have got a small division of people and the comments coming out are ‘we are going to tie you into the floor’ type of thing.*” Inter-divisional problems were also exacerbated by the fact that people were unsure about “who does what” across the interfaces.

The divisional directors held a senior manager meeting in October to discuss interdivisional issues and how to diffuse developing tensions. As a result of this, action plans and an interdivisional transition plan were developed for the next six months. This plan was issued with the team brief and used to report progress in subsequent briefs. However, in the absence of any interventions that appeared to address directly the interdivisional tensions, the “them and us” situation remained, and was exacerbated by the lack of knowledge of the contract details. Staff were reported to be reluctant to do work that was not going to be in their contract. Middle managers were constantly having to negotiate across the divisional boundaries the details of their roles and responsibilities to resolve “who does what”, as “[we thought] the review group would have thought out more of the present problems being experienced than it has.” (Engineering, middle manager)

A continuation of “business as usual” added to the interdivisional tension. The Core division was perceived to be slow to take on its new duties: “*The phrase ‘Business as Usual’ is being used too freely... certain sections are hiding behind this.*” (Services, middle manager.) Business as usual became an excuse. This caused significant resentment between the Core division and the Service divisions: “*Business as usual, it was a laugh, really. They created Core division and Engineering ran it....*” (Engineering, middle manager.) The prolonged business as usual also created workload problems for the service divisions. Because downsizing had proceeded to plan, as long as business as usual continued, they were being asked to cope with a workload that did not match their resources.

Explaining interdivisional tensions

Again, the sensemaking perspective can help to explain how counteracting consequences, such as interdivisional tensions, arise through the focus on the impact of existing schemata and informal recipient interactions. In the early days (see Figure 5, time periods T0 to T2), the imposed change interventions, in particular the new structure regarding contracts, symbolically challenged the old routines and the schemata of how colleagues worked together. There was a history of the staff in all three divisions working together as colleagues of equal power and status on the basis of ‘goodwill’. Staff in the service divisions were used to viewing the assets of the company as theirs, but the new structure challenged this: “*They are now saying that Core division owns the system, and Engineering are purely contractors. There is an awful lot of people in Engineering who felt a real pride and ownership in their bit of the network.*” (Engineering, middle manager.) However, whereas early false interpretations of change in the core division were counteracted by the stories, gossip and discussion circulating about observed behaviours and experiences, here early interpretations were reinforced by such informal social processes, with many stories circulating about the negative impact of the new structure – particularly for those outside the Core division: “*Selection of Engineering/Core staff – Core the elite; Engineering the rest. Result friction between the two.*” (Engineering, middle manager.)

In addition there were rumours and stories about tensions between the divisional directors: “*The senior managers are polarising into their separate divisions and not working together to achieve their common goals. This polarising by the senior management is being reflected in Engineering by the*

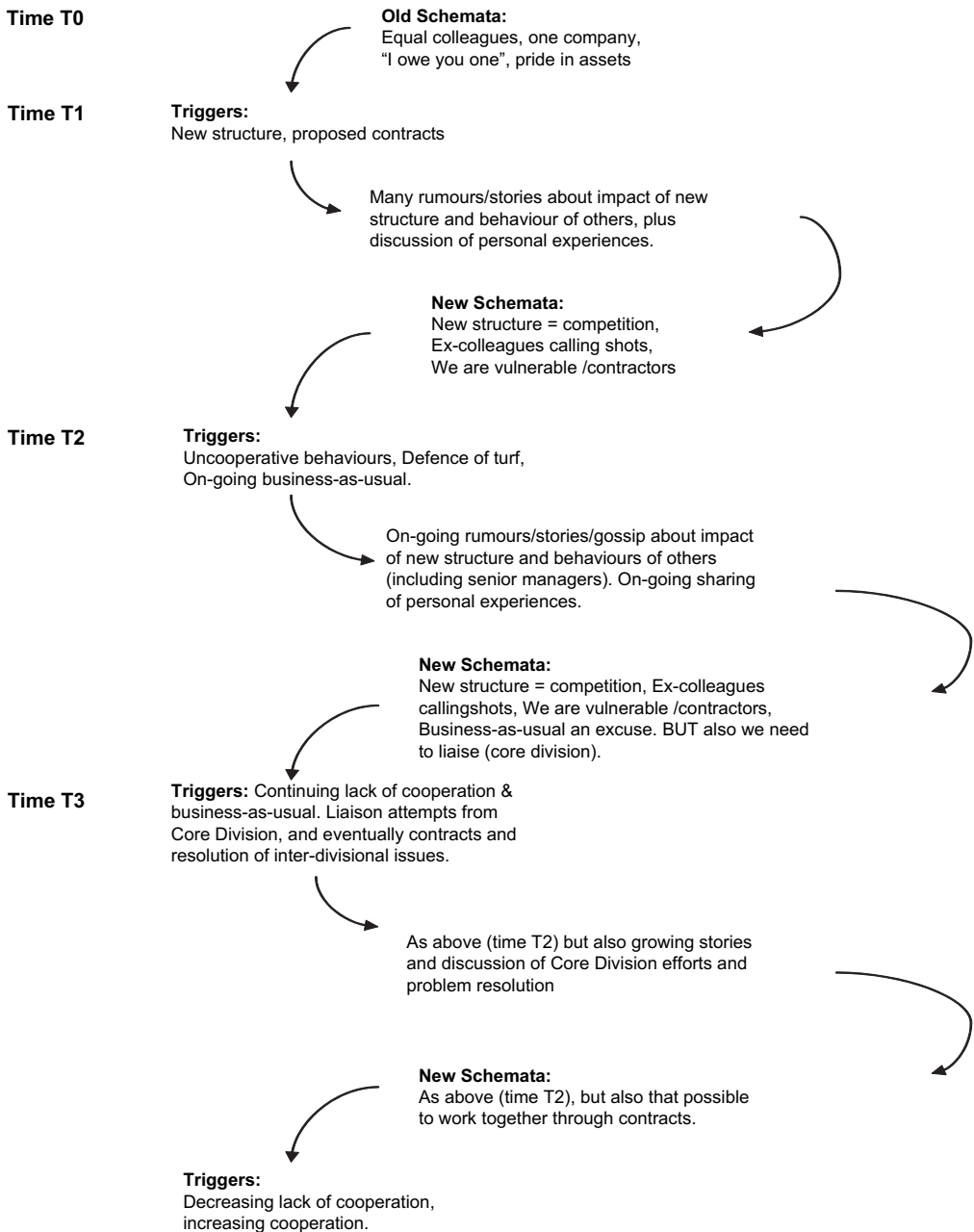


Figure 5. Interdivisional tensions and interdivision co-operation

way the engineers seem to be defending 'their' ground, 'their' workload and 'their' staff against the good of the business as a whole." (Core division, middle manager.) These stories were all triggered by behaviours that staff were encountering in each other. There were also rumours and stories about the Core division in the other divisions: "Core Division are taking staff to watch Engineering do the work." (Engineering, middle manager.) There was a vicious circle with early interpretations, such as "them and us", "new structure = competition", and in Engineering "we are vulnerable/contractors/no longer own the assets we maintain" was reinforced by rumours and stories, leading to further unco-operative behaviour with other divisions, and in turn to more reinforcing stories. Individual divisions also became protective of their own interests: "Core division staff were denied access to a works database used by Engineering. The rumour regarding the reason for this is

that an argument took place between Engineering and Core after information produced from the system was used by Core staff in a meeting.” (Core division, middle manager.)

While the senior managers did supposedly take action, such as the meeting to stem this vicious cycle, there were no visible actions, and therefore no social processes of interaction triggered among staff to suggest that the interpretations developed were wrong. Instead, there was more informal interaction reinforcing the perceptions of the need to ringfence the different divisions. The resentment of the Core division in the service divisions was clearly and regularly expressed: “Core are only just beginning to flex their muscle now. In fact I sent a memorandum out to the lads on Friday stating Core division as flexing their muscles. We must be one step in front of them, we have got to repel the borders... This is how you feel.” (Engineering, middle manager.) There was even a cartoon circulating in the Core division depicting the three different divisions at war, with each dug into a trench surrounded by barbed wire. Thus this reinforcing cycle of events and behaviours shared through stories, rumours and discussions continued.

Vignette 3: Interdivisional co-operation out of interdivisional tensions

Alongside the antagonisms and tensions between the divisions there was also an unanticipated development that was positive. As change progressed into the autumn and problems between the divisions emerged, many Core division middle managers saw the need to liaise with the other divisions to reduce tensions. They wanted to retain the skills, pride and ownership in the service divisions: “Most staff are aware that the other divisions are part of our company and if the company is to be successful, the way is to make them more efficient, squashing them down isn’t the way to do it... you’ve got to take them with you.” (Core division, middle manager.) Similarly, the managers used liaison and negotiation once the contracts came into force at the start of the second year of change to resolve problems. Core division staff initially moved cautiously, not wanting to be heavy-handed and giving their ex-colleagues time to respond to issues: “One of our team is chasing the work under one of the contracts... we have sat and patiently waited to see their response in the first few weeks, we could have come down on the 2 April, the contract says and we’d like these programmes, where are they, we could have done that quite happily, we haven’t done, we’ve let it run to see what the response is.” (Core division, middle manager.)

Unfortunately, while these liaison activities did start to create the contractual relationships desired between the divisions, the underlying interdivisional tensions in the Service divisions remained: “At senior management level we have managed to talk a good story and agree that everybody is co-operating, but when people are on the other end of the telephone demanding information and you don’t have the staff there to provide it then it is a different story, then staff attitudes are different.” (Engineering, middle manager.)

Explaining interdivisional co-operation

In the third vignette we see how the focus on existing schemata and informal interactions can help explain how a reinforcing consequence can develop from earlier counteracting consequences. As change progressed, middle managers in the Core division became concerned about the impact of the interdivisional tensions: “It is causing problems, there is no doubt about that. It is causing not insignificant acrimony.” The managers wanted to create harmonious relationships with their peers in the service divisions, and sort out differences amicably: “I have the intention of seeing someone in Engineering face to face to try and iron out a few specific issues... I was going in to oil the wheels and try and convince him, off my own bat, about the area’s ways been the best way to go about it.” (Core division, middle manager.) They believed that to be successful they needed the skills in Engineering and Services – the old culture was one of technical excellence. As a result, as change progressed, the Core division managers endeavoured to create more positive relationships with their service division peers. “They’ve seen me, they know what my thoughts are... how I envisage the contract being handled in the future. So they know they are going to be able to talk to me, and I’m not going to be somebody wielding a big stick.” (Core division, middle manager.) As with the other examples, these actions became positive sensemaking triggers, captured and shared informally

by those on the receiving end through stories and discussions that counteracted some of the negative experiences (see Figure 5, time period T3).

Initially, these attempts met with some cynicism in the other divisions with, for example, complaints of no deliverables from meetings, reinforcing existing interpretations. However, towards the end of the first year of change, these Core division attempts at liaison developed into concrete (formal) actions that were well received by managers in the other divisions, and were therefore shared informally through more stories and exchanges of experiences. For example, the construction section of the Core division put in place a structure that mirrored the structure within Engineering to facilitate co-ordination. The Engineering managers told stories about this to others: “*I think that what has been set up is excellent because we have now got something in Core that actually mirrors what happens in Engineering and we have got points of reference where we can go to.*” (Engineering, middle manager.) As the implementation of the contracts led to the resolution of problems, such as disputes of “who does what”, more individuals in the service divisions (informally) discussed and shared their improving relationships: “*Core division are taking on a lot of the responsibilities they should have been... We used to get all the customer complaints, and now they are taking the complaints that are relevant to them.*” (Engineering, middle manager.) The resolution of “who does what” and other problems such as black holes in terms of responsibilities, also led to a lack of, or reduction in, reinforcing stories and discussions about the negative impact of the changes. As informal social interaction about negative aspects of the new structure reduced and more informal processes focused on the resolution of problems and successful attempts at working together, interpretations developed that it was possible to work together through the contracts. Thus contract-based interdivisional co-operation did occur, although the relationships remained uneasy because of the service divisions’ interpretation of the ultimate implications of the new structure.

Challenging assumptions about change

The above vignettes illustrate how we can analyse most of the unintended consequences through Figure 2. We can see how the designed change goals and interventions, such as the new structure, the review group output, the new job roles and responsibilities and the communication events, but also unplanned events such as the behaviours of the divisional directors and senior managers, became *sensemaking triggers*. These triggers were then interpreted within the context of *existing schemata* and through *social processes of interaction*, some occurring between the senior and middle managers, but many more occurring between the middle managers, in the form of discussions, sharing of experiences, negotiations, rumours, stories, gossip, but also non-verbal processes, such as behaviours and actions. As earlier interpretations created particular sets of behaviours, these acted as additional sensemaking triggers to create an ongoing cycle. This in turn led to a number of *reinforcing outcomes* (such as staff adaptation and culture change) and *counteracting outcomes* (such as the interdivisional tensions and prolonged business as usual). These outcomes (and resulting disputes) in turn led to other issues.

Unanticipated outcomes arise from the way individuals “make sense” of change interventions

This study is significant because it shows change to be an interpretive process. Unanticipated outcomes cannot be accounted for purely in terms of insufficient planning and project management, as they arise from the way individuals “make sense” of change interventions. Similarly, anticipated outcomes occur when individuals make sense of interventions in a way that is consistent with those who designed them. Senior managers therefore cease to be in direct control of the outcomes of change. Some level of compliance can be forced through new structures, systems and roles, but recipients still edit senior manager plans through their interpretations and their resulting actions. Indeed, many sensemaking processes that shape individuals’ interpretations occur out of the

presence and control of senior managers. While change results from the interaction between vertical (from senior managers to recipients) and lateral (inter-recipient) sensemaking and sensegiving processes, most sense is made between recipients through lateral and largely informal everyday conversational and social practices, such as the behaviour of others, and storytelling and gossip. Yet the focus for design and management remains with the vertical and more formal interventions. There is clearly a contradiction here.

Table 1 lays out some of the assumptions that typically underpin change management within practitioner texts, and contrasts them with the implications suggested by the sensemaking perspective adopted here. Table 2 lists some of the implications for practice that stem from these different assumptions. The remainder of the paper explores the issues raised in Table 1 and discusses the implications for practice.

Planning and monitoring change

Much practitioner literature on change gives the impression that change can be controlled by senior managers in a top-down fashion. The key is to develop comprehensive change plans that take best practice into account – lots of communication, clear assignment of responsibility, management of stakeholders to overcome resistance, training in new ways of working, and so on. Monitoring change progress is about ticking the various activities off the project management Gantt charts as they occur, with periodic attitude surveys. While most of this is sound advice, the unfortunate implication is that practice falls out of senior manager policy as people adopt these well-crafted and communicated plans. By comparison, this research shows that while senior managers can initiate and influence the direction of change, the direction is determined by recipient interpretations of

Table 1. Assumptions about change management practice

Assumptions about design of top-down change: existing practitioner literature	Assumptions about design of top-down change: this research
Change can be controlled by senior managers in a top-down fashion. Practice falls out of senior manager policy as people adopt well-crafted and communicated plans. Monitoring of change by ticking activities off Gantt charts.	Senior managers can initiate and influence direction of change, but not direct change. Practice is determined by interpretation of plans and actions by those on receiving end of planned interventions.
Vertical, formal communication from senior managers to others seen as key forum for creating understanding of change.	Lateral and informal communication between peers primary vehicle for developing interpretations of what change is about.
Communication primarily construed of in terms of formal verbal and written channels. Seen as the transmission of information.	Communication seen to be about both conversational and social practices (actions, behaviours, words), and to include formal and informal mechanisms such as rumours, storytelling, gossip, discussions. Communication more to do with generating new knowledge and shared meanings.
Managing Meaning: Where need for symbolic as well as verbal and written communications is recognised, managing meaning is taken to be about the use of series of related senior manager top-down interventions to shape individual's interpretations.	Aligning interpretations: a two-way process of sharing and developing interpretations through many different communication genres.
Change "recipients" and change implementers are there to accurately deploy and disseminate senior manager plans	Change recipients actively translate and edit plans to create change

Table 2. Implications for change management practice

Assumptions about design of top-down change: this research	Implications for practice
Senior managers can initiate & influence direction of change, but not direct change. Practice is determined by interpretation of plans and actions by those on receiving end of planned interventions.	Monitoring change is about understanding what interpretations are developing and why. Needs to be continuous. Requires specific monitoring mechanisms to capture recipients developing responses to change interventions.
Lateral and informal communication between peers as influential in the development of interpretations of what change is about than formal and vertical communication.	As change moves from design to implementation, senior managers need to move away from a reliance on more formal and vertical communications, and engage with lateral, informal interrecipient communications – either by taking themselves to the sensemaking, or by bringing the sensemaking to them through events designed to do this.
Communication seen to be about both conversational and social practices (actions, behaviours, words), and to include formal and informal mechanisms such as rumours, storytelling, gossip, discussions. Communication more to do with generating new knowledge and shared meanings.	Greater investment required in change conversations, with recognition of the multiple conversational vehicles that exist. Senior managers/change leaders need to live the changes they want others to adopt – avoiding inconsistencies between their actions, words and deeds.
Aligning interpretations: a two-way process of sharing and developing interpretations through many different communication genres.	Requires a more active involvement by senior managers. More explicit attention is required to discussion and storytelling. Senior managers need to work with the reality of change recipients, responding to their issues and interpretations. Focus should be on obtaining understanding of higher level principles, rather than the detail.
Change recipients actively translate and edit plans to create change	Recipients mediate the outcomes of planned changes. For the other recommendations to be adopted, senior managers need to acknowledge this and accept the need to engage more actively with recipients. In larger organisations, this may need to be achieved through the use of a number of change ambassadors.

plans and senior manager actions. Of course the advice offered in many texts on change such as detailed planning; a balanced set of measures to assess progress and direct attention, effort and action; early wins; and strong project management skills are critical to the success of large change projects. However, to gauge change progress in terms of advances in behaviours and practices it is essential to understand what interpretations are developing and why on an ongoing basis, which in turn requires proximity to those on the receiving end: *“It is not just about have you done that piece of communication, but were their eyes shining when you gave them the message.”* (A change manager at Utilco.) This has practical implications for the way change progress is monitored.

Informal versus formal sensemaking: aligning interpretations not managing meaning

It is generally accepted that change requires extensive communication. However, in general there are three related assumptions about communication. First, most articles and books on change place

emphasis on vertical communication from senior managers as a key forum for creating understanding of planned changes. Second, communication is primarily conceived of in terms of formal verbal and written communications. Third, although there is recognition in some texts of the power of symbolic as well as verbal and written communications, this is often coupled with the notion of “managing meaning”. In other words, senior managers can shape individuals’ interpretations through the use of stage-managed and interrelated communications, behaviours and events. Again there are assumptions of senior manager control.

This research suggests something different. First, it shows that in fact lateral communications between peers are just as important, if not more important, than vertical communications in shaping the interpretations of change. In addition, much of this lateral communication is informal, occurring through gossip, discussion, negotiations, observed actions and behaviours as individuals go about their daily work. We can see this in the examples above of both counteracting and reinforcing outcomes. Senior managers in particular become agents of “indirect infection”, influencing through their appearance as ghosts in the stories and gossip exchanged by change recipients about the change process.¹⁰ Only a few people may have direct experience of senior management behaviour, but these experiences are shared through rumour and gossip – whether or not they actually occurred. As such, visible actions – whether planned or not, whether by senior managers or peers – that indicate either that things are different or that things are staying the same despite espoused change, become important influencers of interpretations. Similarly, visible behaviours that appear to contradict the official communicated intent of change are also important influencers when shared by recipients.

Communication has more to do with *generating* the new knowledge and shared meanings required for strategic transformation, than the straightforward transmission of information. As existing interpretations affect the way that new interventions are received, the extent to which it is possible to manipulate and stage-manage language and symbolic devices such as stories, events and behaviours to portray certain meanings is questionable. As such, “managing meaning”, with its connotations of control may be an inappropriate metaphor. Change is more about “aligning interpretations” where this is a two-way process of sharing and negotiating interpretations through many different communication genre. The meaning of the top-down initiatives emerges bottom-up. This has practical implications for the way change leaders conceive of their role and the way they communicate.

Change participants not change recipients

Another implication that appears strongly in most practitioner literature is that change “recipients” and change implementers are there to accurately deploy and disseminate senior manager plans. While there are many exhortations about participation and involvement to encourage greater understanding of the need for change and ownership of the change interventions, these are primarily presented as means of overcoming resistance. Whereas if it is acknowledged, as the findings here suggest, that senior manager change plans are actively translated and edited by change recipients as they try to understand and negotiate with their peers the implications of the plans for themselves, this changes the way we think of recipients. We need to move away from reifying change as something done to and placed on individuals, and instead acknowledge the role that change recipients play in creating and shaping change outcomes. This has practical implications for the way change leaders engage with those on the receiving end of their interventions, the role expectations of those on the receiving end, and therefore the planning of change.

In particular, this research illustrates the pivotal role that can be played by middle managers in top-down change programmes. They put into action the plans of their seniors, but in a way that makes sense to them. They become the intermediaries of the senior manager’s plans, having to undertake change themselves, yet also then implement change within their part of the organisation.¹¹ As such, interpretation becomes a key middle manager activity. These managers need to engage in a range of sensemaking activities, both upwards with their senior managers, and laterally with their peers (and ultimately downwards with their teams), to aid their interpretation of the change intent and negotiate how the change should be taken forwards. This interpretation activity then informs the personal changes they attempt to undertake, how they help others through change

and what changes they implement in their departments. Again, there are practical implications from this of the conception of the middle manager role during change and the activities that can support them in their role.

Implications for practice: encouraging the positives and countering the negatives

We can see that many of the assumptions about change management typically found within practitioner texts, and summarised in Table 1, are reflected in the change process examined here. As argued above, in many ways, the approach to change taken in the case study organisation was a classic, almost textbook, top-down change programme, with a focus on formal, vertical communications to achieve understanding, and the expectation that well-developed plans would deliver the intended changes. However, by tracking the middle manager experiences of change and adopting a sensemaking approach, the research shows how both counteracting and reinforcing outcomes arise outside of these formal interventions. This suggests that:

- (1) we need to change our assumptions about how we manage change; and
- (2) consider the practical implications of the new assumptions.

While counteracting consequences cannot necessarily be prevented, they need to be minimised, and when they do arise, detected and dealt with. Reinforcing consequences – particularly unexpected ones – need to be encouraged and strengthened (see Table 2).

Monitoring change

The first practical issue is that of monitoring change. Periodic attitude surveys can detect overall changes but they cannot be carried out with much greater frequency than six-monthly. Monitoring change needs to be ongoing and frequent. Senior managers need to have their ears to the ground. This requires explicit monitoring mechanisms to provide regular feedback on how people are responding and reacting to change, and why. By chance, this was present in this change process as this service was provided by the researcher. Monitoring could be achieved through senior manager “managing by walking about”, but it is possible that during major strategic change individuals are nervous about speaking up, in which case it may be necessary to use focus groups or some other means of collecting data, such as non-attributable diaries. Free exchange of views and opinions can also be facilitated by the use of an outsider – and the risks of bias in reporting is also reduced if an outsider not involved in advising or designing change is employed to write the feedback reports. In addition, as in this research, it is possible to use a network of individuals, who not only pass their own opinions back, but are there for others to pass their concerns on to. A downside of monitoring systems is that they can be abused with attempts to further individual self-interest through what is reported, how things are reported and what is withheld. A wide and overlapping network of participants is needed to reduce such risks.

The type of monitoring suggested here provides information on not only what people are thinking and therefore doing, but *why*. It is this “why” that is critical as the basis for action. As these (unanticipated) outcomes are due to *perceptions*, they cannot necessarily be dealt with through rational arguments. The causes of the perceptions have to be understood. Knowing the why enables change leaders to identify which behaviours and actions need to be stopped or changed (either because the behaviours are representative of the past, or because they are new but creating unhelpful interpretations of the changes), and which behaviours and actions need to be encouraged as they are fostering helpful interpretations. The why enables change leaders to engage with the issues of the change recipients and work with their reality as opposed to the reality of the change leaders. The two are often different. The Core division director, for example, was irritated by concerns about the office move when he had assured everyone that there were no problems, and by the charges of his lack of visibility when, from his perspective, he was always out and about in the offices. However, he recognised that if these were the staff issues then they had to be responded to in ways that showed his awareness of their concerns and related to their reality – thus the office

move communications team and his efforts to take questions at organised events. If no significant actions result, as with the interdivisional tensions, or the complaints in Engineering about the continuation of the blame/control culture, cynicism will grow about the commitment to the proclaimed changes.

Communicating change

If we think of communication as a means of generating an alignment of interpretations rather than to manage meaning, an understanding of *why* individuals are interpreting things a certain way can help with this. Yet, paradoxically, senior managers have far less control over processes of change than traditional thinking on the management of change suggests, because they cannot control the lateral interrecipient sensemaking processes. While senior managers may not be able to direct these informal sensemaking processes, if they recognise their existence they may be able to participate in them and shape them – by either taking themselves to the sensemaking in the way the Core division director attempted to do, or by bringing the sensemaking to them. For the former to be possible, senior managers, or others they can rely on as ambassadors for change, need to be out in the organisation, talking to people, sharing stories, listening and setting an example through their behaviours and actions. For the latter to be possible, senior managers need to orchestrate more events at which individuals come together (with the senior managers) to share thoughts and impressions of the way change is developing.

Senior managers have far less control over processes of change than traditional thinking on the management of change suggests

Work on knowledge generation, and innovation in general, suggests something similar.¹² Individuals need space away from their normal work environment where they can explore differing interpretations and come to some shared sense of what they are collectively trying to achieve and how they should do this. Modelling and workshop techniques such as cause maps, and model building can help individuals reveal their assumptions and thoughts about their current and future organisation, their work and their colleagues.¹³ While many processes of change may incorporate such techniques into early workshops, they are restricted to the early days of change. Many participants have more questions about what change means for them and how they go about their changed job roles when they are actually in the middle of change and trying to implement it. Thus workshops are needed throughout the change process offering the leaders a chance to interact with the sensemaking processes of their subordinates. While this happened to some extent in the Core division, it rarely happened in the two service divisions.

In addition, senior managers need to be prepared to invest in change conversations and recognise that this means both verbal and non-verbal communication as well as both formal and informal. This all implies a much more active role for senior managers during change, engaging others in discussion and dialogue and going well beyond “managing by walking about”. They need to move from ghostly presence to physical presence, listening much more closely to the feedback from individuals about what is stopping them changing and seeing the feedback as genuine comment rather than symptomatic of resistance. Thus leaders of change need to reconceive their role. Furthermore, as senior managers can’t manage the detail of change, they need to focus more on a few high-level simple rules that can be used to guide actions and interpretations locally.¹⁴ What matters is that individuals understand the principles of what they are trying to achieve, so that they can engage in actions and activities consistent with that. This is why so many texts on change focus on the importance of having a shared vision. Arguably the change process studied provided such a structural blueprint, but there was confusion over the guiding principles and expectations of the new structure, and therefore what middle managers should do to realise it. The intended “simple rules” were missing, so instead the middle managers developed unintended simple rules

to do with competition and protection of self-interest. Fortunately, the Core division middle managers arrived at a different set of simple rules to do with the need for the survival of, and co-operation with, the two service divisions.

Finally, informal systems can have as much power as formal. Many organisations can't use formal reward mechanisms to signal approval of certain behaviours and disapproval of others early on in the change process. This shouldn't stop them using informal mechanisms such as public thank-yous, prizes or success stories to encourage adoption of appropriate behaviours. Such actions were largely missing from the change programme studied here.

Roles in change

Many of the previous suggestions for practice centre on the need for a different conception of the senior manager role in change. The focus of change leaders, particularly once implementation is under way, needs to shift from the vertical and more formal interventions, to more informal and ad-hoc communications, with greater involvement between the change leaders and those actually implementing the changes. The senior managers need to remain actively involved in the changes and not delegate to others. This is, of course, very time-consuming, and will therefore only happen if senior managers see it as a priority and recognise the potential downsides of not investing the time. Connected to this is a need to rethink what is meant by "communication" within the context of change management. However, there are also issues about the way leaders of change conceive the role of recipients. Restructuring is seen as an end in itself. It is assumed that if people are given new roles and responsibilities, and the purpose of change is explained, the rest will follow.

Senior managers need to remain actively involved in the changes and not delegate to others

Yet we know that the outcome of an intervention by senior managers in one component, such as structure, cannot guarantee a corresponding change in another component, such as working relationships, because the outcome of that intervention is mediated by interrecipient sensemaking processes. New structures and change in general are "rough hewn as we will". Recipients need to be viewed as active creators of change, and as the translators of plans, rather than passive beneficiaries. Such a reconception of change recipients, and in particular middle managers, reinforces the need for senior managers to engage more actively with these individuals. But how practical is this? How can a few senior managers engage maybe 100 or more middle managers, especially in geographically-dispersed organisations? Modern mechanisms such as e-mail appear a temptingly easy way to reach large audiences, yet e-mail does not provide the necessary two-way discussion. This implies a more diffuse model of leadership, with a strong group of change champions or ambassadors working throughout the organisation to gain understanding and alignment.

There are also implications for planning of the recognition of the active interpretation role of change recipients. As we see here, much sensemaking and communication activity occurs informally – and for middle managers this sensemaking activity is crucial to the actions they take to make change happen. If time is not allowed for this activity, and greater opportunity for access to those who can help is not provided, it at best creates a heavy workload, and at worst simply doesn't happen, with knock-on implications for change progress. An overloaded middle manager can become a barrier to change simply through workload, rather than through malicious intent.

Conclusion

This framework highlights the significant impact of change recipients, and middle managers in particular, on actual outcomes achieved, even in top-down programmes of change, and suggests

we need to reconsider both what we mean by “managing” change, and the way senior managers lead change. Managing change is traditionally equated with senior managers exercising control in a top-down fashion. The focus of attention is on formal, top-down communications and interventions, with recipients, and particularly middle managers, viewed as linking pins there to carry out senior manager plans without question. Prevarication, questioning, deviation, and so on, are typically seen as obstructive and unwarranted resistance. While this research acknowledges senior managers’ ability to initiate and influence change, through the adoption of an interpretive approach to change it also helps to illustrate how recipients of change mediate interventions and outcomes through the way they make sense of change interventions. Therefore senior managers cannot just issue edicts and carefully developed plans and expect them to be translated without question into action. A well-known quotation from the chief executive of a US airline reflects this: “You need to be down there among the blood and the guts and the beer.”¹⁵ Change requires a more active involvement by senior managers beyond “managing by walking about”. Reinforcing outcomes arise from shared understanding and commitment. To achieve this, change leaders need to be present – either personally or through other change ambassadors – with the change recipients, as orchestrators and facilitators of change. They need to embody and live the changes they want others to adopt, and deal with the concerns of others and issues that arise. Similarly, if counteracting outcomes are to be avoided, senior managers must avoid inconsistencies in actions, words and behaviours. In particular they need to be able to recognise, come to terms with and respond to the problems and messages stemming from their own behaviours.

Appendix A

In this research, early data analysis was intertwined data collection. Each set of diary entries was read as they were received. In cases where the researcher needed more information on a particular point she contacted the diarists by telephone. Then from each set of diary entries the researcher compiled a report on the progress of change for the divisional directors detailing the main themes from the diaries. The reports were progress reports only and contained no recommendations or comment from the researcher to ensure the researcher remained, as far as possible, objective and unbiased. The diarists knew that the researcher was writing these reports and saw copies of them as they were written. No diarists were named in the reports though the research programme was communicated to all in the organisation.

The six-weekly review meetings were held with the diarists and the change managers to discuss how the tracking process was going, and the change-related issues that had arisen for the diarists and their staff. The researcher acted more as an observer at these meetings which were chaired by the change managers. Before these meetings, the researcher also interviewed the divisional change managers to establish their views on progress, and what new initiatives and interventions were being planned.

Taped interviews were held with all the diarists a few weeks after the tracking of progress started and shortly before the tracking ended. The initial interviews were used to gain more understanding of the background and perspective of the individual diarists. The exit interviews were used to gather data on the diarists’ perception of how the change process had gone, the effectiveness of the interventions put in place and the barriers encountered. The diarist also received copies of change-related documentation, such as workshop handouts and team briefings.

All data collected were transcribed and entered into NUD.IST, software to help with the analysis of non-numeric data. The researcher used inductive data analysis techniques which led to the development of the main categories of data identified in [Figure 2](#) – sensemaking triggers (designed change goals and interventions), existing schemata, mediated interpretations (reinforcing and counteracting consequences), and social processes of interaction.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the editor, Charles Baden-Fuller, Paula Jarzabkowski and two anonymous reviewers for their comments.

References

1. Many studies on change reveal the emergent nature of change. See for example the classic study by A. W. Gouldner, *Patterns of Industrial Bureaucracy*, Collier-Macmillan, Canada, Toronto (1954); G. Johnson, *Strategic Change and the Management Process*, Basil Blackwell, Oxford (1987); A. Pettigrew, *The Awakening Giant: Continuity and Change in ICI*, Blackwell, Oxford (1985); T. Hafsi and Z. Tian, 'Towards a Theory of Large Scale Institutional Change', *Long Range Planning* **38**(6), 555–577 (2005); E. Ogbonna and L. C. Harris, 'Managing organisational culture: insights from the hospitality industry', *Human Resource Management Journal* **12**(1), 33–54 (2002); and 'Organizational Culture: A ten year Two-phase Study of Change in the UK Food Retailing Sector', *Journal of Management Studies* **39**(5), 673–707 (2002).
2. See, for example, M. Beer and N. Nohria, 'Cracking the Code of Change', *Harvard Business Review* **May–June**, 133–141 (2000).
3. Beer & Nohria (as above) discuss use of hard and soft levers. Context sensitive change is advocated by V. Hope Hailey and J. Balogun, 'Devising Context Sensitive Approaches to Change: The Example of Glaxo Wellcome', *Long Range Planning* **35**, 153–178 (2002); and C. Stadler and H. Hinterhuber, 'Shell, Siemens and DaimlerChrysler: leading Change in Companies with Strong Values', *Long Range Planning* **38**(5), 467–484 (2005); Noel Tichy, *Managing Strategic Change: Technical, Political and Cultural Dynamics*, John Wiley (1983), discusses holistic change. For an example of change guidelines see John Kotter, 'Leading Change: Why Transformation Efforts Fail', *Harvard Business Review* **March–April**, 59–67 (1995).
4. There is an increasing amount of research acknowledging that we need to pay more attention to the role of those outside senior management teams on strategy and change. See, for example, J. Balogun and G. Johnson, 'Organizational Restructuring and Middle Manager Sensemaking', *Academy of Management Journal* **47**(4), 523–549 (2004); and 'From Intended outcomes to unintended outcomes: The Impact of Change Recipient Sensemaking', *Organization Studies* **26**(11), 1573–1601 (2005); S. Floyd and B. Wooldridge, 'Middle Management's Strategic Influence and Organizational Performance', *Journal of Management Studies* **34**(3), 465–485 (1997); A. Sturdy and C. Grey, 'Beneath and Beyond Organizational Change Management: Exploring Alternatives', *Organization* **10**(4), 651–662 (2003).
5. Pettigrew and Whipp, *Managing change for competitive success*, Blackwell, Oxford (1991); A. M. Pettigrew, E. Ferlie and L. McKee, *Shaping Strategic Change*, Sage Publications, London (1992).
6. Many writers on change acknowledge the difficulties of managing transitions. See T. Jick, *Managing Change: Cases and Concepts*, Irwin, Homewood, IL (1993); R. M. Kanter, B. Stein and T. D. Jick, *The Challenge of Organizational Change*, The Free Press (1992).
7. L. Harris and E. Ogbonna, 'The unintended consequences of culture interventions: a study of unexpected outcomes', *British Journal of Management* **13**(1), 31–49 (2002).
8. For explanations of schemata see S. T. Fiske and S. E. Taylor, *Social Cognition*, 2nd ed., McGraw-Hill, New York (1991); or papers by Balogun and Johnson (see 5 above) For a fuller discussion of cognition and sensemaking, see Karl Weick, *Sensemaking in Organizations*, Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA (1995).
9. Many articles discuss the different types of social interactions individuals engage in during change. See for example L. A. Isabella, 'Evolving Interpretations as Change Unfolds: How Managers Construe Key organizational Events', *Academy of Management Journal* **33**(1), 7–41 (1990); and D. A. Gioia and K. Chittipeddi, 'Sensemaking and sensegiving in strategic change initiation', *Strategic Management Journal* **12**, 433–448 (1991); Other such as B. Vogel, 'Linking for change: towards the emergence of collective, focused and energetic behaviour', *Long Range Planning*, (2005) show the importance of interaction within networks of actors for collective action.
10. J. D. Ford, 'Organizational change as shifting conversations', *Journal of Organizational Change Management* **12**, 480–500 (1999).
11. For a longer discussion of such issues see J. Balogun, 'From Blaming the Middle to Harnessing its Potential: Creating Change Intermediaries', *British Journal of Management* **14**(1), 69–84 (2003).
12. See, for example R. J. Boland and R. V. Tenkasi, 'Perspective Making and Perspective Taking in Communities of Knowing', *Organization Science* **6**(4), 350–372 (1995); and I. Nonaka, 'The knowledge creating company', *Harvard Business Review* **Nov–Dec**, 96–104 (1991); I. Nonaka and H. Takeuchi, *The Knowledge-Creating Company*, Oxford University Press, New York (1995).
13. For more information on modeling techniques see J. R. Doyle and D. Sims, 'Enabling strategic metaphor in conversation: A technique of cognitive sculpting', in A. S. Huff and M. Jenkins (eds.), *Mapping Strategic Knowledge*, Sage, London (2002).

14. For a discussion of the use of simple rules see K. M. Eisenhardt and D. N. Sull, Strategy as Simple Rules, *Harvard Business Review* 79(1), 106–116 (2001).
15. From Jick, 1993.

Biography

Julia Balogun is Professor of Strategic Management at Cass Business School, City University, London. Julia specialises in processes of strategy development and strategic change. She is a founder member and organiser of the strategy of practice community, a network established to explore the practice of strategy with a focus on strategists and their activities. She publishes widely in the area of strategy and change. Her publications include articles in the *Academy of Management Journal and Organisation Studies*, and her book, *Exploring Strategic Change*, the second edition of which was published in November 2003. j.balogun@city.ac.uk