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MPC Major Research Paper

Collaboration, Compassion and Conversation:
Exploring Change Management Trends and Strategies

Supervisor: Dr. Catherine Schryer

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Ryerson University
Toronto, Ontario, Canada

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Abstract

This research project explores current trends in organizational change management as characterized in online business publications. Specifically, with the intention of developing an understanding of current trends, I examine areas of consensus and debate within change management content by analyzing blogs and articles on the topic of organizational change. With a particular emphasis on the role of communication and communicators, the goal is to develop an understanding of how business journalists and bloggers explain the role of communication during times of organizational transition.

Developing a greater understanding of current trends in change management has the potential to assist employees who are responsible for implementing change by providing up-to-date insights and best practices for executing change programs. Furthermore, by focusing on the role of communication during and about change efforts, this project could also contribute to an understanding of how professional communicators should engage in organizational change efforts.

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Introduction

Inspired by the philosophical idea that “*nothing is constant but change*” (Laertius, 1853), this research project explores current trends in organizational change management as characterized in online business publications. Specifically, with the intention of developing an understanding of current trends, I examine areas of consensus and debate within change management content by analyzing blogs and articles on the topic of organizational change. With a particular emphasis on the role of communication and communicators, the goal is to develop an understanding of how business journalists and bloggers explain the role of communication during times of organizational transition.

By drawing on concepts from theorists like George Herbert Mead (1934), Taylor et al. (2000), Everett Rogers (1995), and a number of contemporary change management scholars from the business management, human resources and internal communications perspectives, I aim to construct a meaningful interpretation of current change management trends and the role of communication during organizational change as represented by business publications including *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review (HBR)*, *The Globe and Mail Report on Business*, *Fast Company*, and *Inc. Magazine*. Specifically, this paper attempts to answer two research questions:

RQ₁: What are the current trends and key concepts in change management discourse as represented in business publications?

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RQ₂: To what extent and how is the role of communication during change management represented in business publications?

Developing a greater understanding of current trends in change management has the potential to assist employees who are responsible for implementing change by providing up-to-date insights and best practices for executing change programs. Furthermore, by focusing on the role of communication during and about change efforts, this project could also contribute to an understanding of how professional communicators should engage in organizational change efforts.

Theoretical Orientation

The sociocultural theory of communication informs my study on change management because this tradition examines how communication functions within social structures such as organizations or companies. As Craig and Muller (2007) write, the sociocultural tradition takes into account concepts such as “social structures, identities, norms, rituals and collective belief systems” (p.365). The perspective explores key questions including “how communication functions to produce, maintain, and change social formations ranging from small groups to the global system” and “how individuals relate to large-scale collectivities and social processes” (Craig and Muller, 2007, p.365). In particular, this project will concentrate on the micro approach to the sociocultural theory of communication which focuses on the role of individuals within organizations (Craig and Muller, 2007). The micro approach is particularly appropriate because change management research is often about (1) the relationships between employees and processes or structures within an organization experiencing change, (2) the behavior of individual employees and leadership within a organization experiencing change, and (3), the role of communication within organizations that are experiencing change. The micro approach, as demonstrated in Mead (1934), Taylor et al. (2000), and Rogers (1995), provides insights into the role of communication within organizations and key concepts that help explain change management efforts.

Mead's Approach to Communication

In the *Social Foundations and Functions of Thought and Communication*, as cited in Craig and Muller (2007), Mead (1934) explores four main ideas that are relevant to a study on organizational change, including: communication involving “participation in the other” (p.371), the role of the leader (p.373), the importance of finding a common interest to facilitate communication (p. 373), and the importance of having information to communicate (p.374). These four ideas provide a strong starting point for understanding how communication functions within organizations.

First, Mead explains that communication involving “participation in the other” (p.371) is about understanding how to direct communication so it is most effective in a social setting (p.372). It is not only about engaging with other people through communication, but also about being aware of the “other” in how a message is delivered and received (p.372). In other words, communication is most effective when the communicator has a strong sense of self and audience. This perspective, Mead says, is important for individual development and for the development of collaborative activity in a social setting (p.372).

Next, in addition to strong self and audience awareness, Mead suggests leaders play an important role within organizations, especially when they are “capable of entering into the attitudes of the other members of the group” (p.373) and subsequently able to facilitate communication between different people or groups. Mead is suggesting that successful leaders should be able to bring

different groups of people together through their communication. Within an organization, this means leadership communication can help create a sense of unity and collectivity.

A third idea that Mead explores is the importance of defining a common interest within a group in order to facilitate communication (p.373). Mead writes that a common interest leads to co-operative activity and, in turn, communication between group members (p.373). He then specifically identifies religion and economics as two fundamental common interests in human society that can be the starting point for any communication and co-operation (p.373). The goal here seems to be about finding a commonality that all members of the group can relate to or identify with, and then beginning any communication with this common interest so as to engage each member of the group.

While the above concepts provide some important elements to consider when looking at the role of communication within organizations, perhaps most importantly Mead states that above all “one has to have something to communicate before communicating” (p.374). While this insight may appear simplistic, this sentence could act as a guiding idea for any organizational communication. By highlighting the fundamental importance of having a clearly defined message and purpose before communicating within a social setting, alongside the other concepts explored above, Mead provides a foundational, approach to the sociocultural theory of communication.

Taylor et al.'s Approach to Communication

In addition to Mead (1934), Taylor et al.'s (2000) work fits within the micro approach of the sociocultural theory of communication. While both scholars look at the role of communication within organizations, Mead provides a strong introduction to communication within organizations. Meanwhile, Taylor et al.'s work goes further to explore how communication unfolds to create and reinforce organizational structure and enable the performance of tasks (p. 400). In other words, Taylor et al.'s work provides a deeper understanding of how employees can use communication to move projects or plans forward within an organization, a perspective that provides insight to a study on change management. As such, these scholars suggest a number of key factors that influence communication, including: circumstance (the situation that faces the organization as a whole), conversation and conversation form (what is being said and how), frame knowledge (how individuals and groups recognize and understand a situation, including the nature of the organization, hierarchy, etc.), and construction knowledge (how individuals and groups interact) (p.401). Because these concepts help explain the overall environment and could impact how an organization functions, Taylor et al. suggest that employees must consider these concepts before communication occurs.

Beyond these influences, Taylor et al. suggest that for individuals or groups to communicate successfully, they must have a level of agency, or the ability to "act-for someone or something" (p.396). This agency creates and

reinforces structure or hierarchy within an organization and forms interdependent relationships that impact communication (p.395). This concept of agency, as explored by Taylor et al., reflects Mead's work on the role of the leader. Both imply that a certain level of power is needed to communicate effectively within an organization. What is interesting to note is that Taylor et al.'s idea of agency is not framed within the language of leadership. As such, the authors infer that various actors within an organization may be able to exercise agency in an attempt to act for something.

Taylor et al. also identify the presence of metaconversations within organizations. They observe that, "an organization can be thought of as a dense overlay of many conversations, each oriented to some phase of activity" (p.400). In other words, at any time there may be multiple conversations going on within an organization, as well as one main conversation that reflects the organization as a whole. When viewed through a change management lens, this concept acknowledges the different groups within an organization and the varying conversations they may have about the same topic...in this case, the prescribed change. While Taylor et al. do not provide suggestions for addressing these different groups, it is important for organizations to acknowledge and act on the fact that they exist within organizations.

When applied to change management, Taylor et al.'s theory suggests that change communication is an act towards something (in this case, the desired change). Relating to the key concepts presented above, change communicators

should act with the larger organizational context in mind, as no communication is independent of the situation in which it occurs. Finally, this research also suggests that when change is communicated, a certain level of agency must exist within those leading the effort, agency that acknowledges and reinforces organizational hierarchy, and navigates the various conversations that occur within an organization.

Rogers' Approach to Communication

The third and final theorist I will examine as I explore the sociocultural tradition of communication is Everett Rogers and his theory of the diffusion of innovation.

While Mead (1934) and Taylor et al. (2000) provide insights about communication within organizations in general, Rogers' theory is important because it focuses specifically on change. At its most basic level, Rogers' (1995) theory is about how new ideas and technologies spread through cultures.

According to Rogers, "diffusion is the process by which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system" (1995, p.5). He considers diffusion to be a special type of communication because it is about new ideas and involves a "degree of uncertainty" (p.5). With this exclusive focus on the adoption of new ideas within organizations, Rogers' diffusion of innovation theory is essential to consider when studying change management. As such, the paragraphs below will explore three

key concepts: the innovation decision process, adopter categories, and the role of leaders during change.

First, the innovation decision process is the process through which an individual “moves from first knowledge of an innovation, to forming an attitude toward the innovation, to a decision to adopt or reject, to implementation and use of the new idea, and [finally] to confirmation of this decision” (p.20). According to Rogers, this process involves five main steps: “knowledge, persuasion, decisions, implementation, confirmation” (p.20). What Rogers has done here, is define a process that individuals experience before they can accept a change. This perspective implies that, at each point in the process, those implementing change should execute different communication strategies to address the evolving needs of individuals experiencing change.

In addition to the innovation decision process, Rogers defines various adopter categories that explain how individuals respond to change or innovation. These categories extend from the least resistant to the most resistant and include: “innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards” (p.22). By providing these categories, Rogers acknowledges that individuals respond to new ideas or change in different ways. For change communication, this suggests a need to tailor communication strategies to each type of adopter.

Finally, using Mead’s language of the leader and Taylor et al.’s language of agency, Rogers (1995), explores the roles of opinion leaders and change agents, suggesting that both roles are crucial to any change effort (p.26).

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According to Rogers, opinion leadership is “the degree to which an individual is able to influence other individuals’ attitudes or overt behavior informally in a desired way with relative frequency,” (p.27). A change agent, on the other hand, is an individual “who influences clients’ innovation-decisions in a direction deemed desirable by a change agent.” (p.27). According to Rogers, both opinion leaders and change agents have great impact on change efforts.

After exploring a progression of ideas from Mead to Taylor et al. to Rogers, it is clear that the sociocultural tradition provides a rich collection of concepts that help explain how communication unfolds within an organization. These concepts create a strong theoretical foundation for my study on organizational change management.

Literature Review

Literature on change management derives from three main perspectives: business management, human resources management, and internal communications. Each provides a different approach to understanding and navigating organizational change. The first perspective, business management, focuses on the overall impact change efforts have on organizations. It is an integral perspective to consider for my research project as the majority of change management research is found within this discipline. The second perspective, human resources management, focuses on how change efforts impact people and behaviour within an organization. Finally, the third and final perspective explores the limited literature found on the topic of internal communications during change management efforts. The following section provides a look at the main scholars and streams of thought on the topic of change management from each perspective, including how each discipline defines the term.

Business Management

Definitions

A natural place to start understanding the business management approach to organizational change is by looking at definitions of change management by various business management scholars. Baca (2005) defines change management as “the proactive identification and management of modifications to a project or organization,” (p.2). Meanwhile, Mills (2006) defines change

management as managing the proposed “modifications effectively so that new ideas can be meshed with existing ones, helping the organization to achieve its goals and objectives,” (p.97). Finally, Carter (2008) writes that change management means “addressing the strategy (what you are trying to change), skills (what capabilities the recipients of the change need for success in the new state), and structures (the long-term and short-term organizational tools that support the new state)” of a change effort (p.20).

A comparison of these definitions suggests that business management literature positions change management as something that organizations need to control and accomplish. Using statements like “management of modifications to a project or organization” (Baca, 2005, p.2), and “helping the organization achieve its goals and objectives” (Mills, 2006, p.97), business management research also clearly takes an organization-wide approach to change management, focusing on the structures and processes the company as a whole needs to address during change.

Key Concepts

Beyond the various definitions of change management, there are two key trends that emerge from this perspective.

First, business management literature suggests that a shift in management style is occurring from a more top-down, hierarchal approach, to a two-way, democratic approach of management. While this shift is present in

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general management, it is also happening in change management efforts (Gomes & Kuntz, 2012; Green 2007; Cloke & Goldsmith, 2002; Kotter 1996). For instance, one major change management scholar in the mid 1900s was Kurt Lewin, a scholar interested in resolving social conflict through behavioural change within organizations and the wider society (Burnes, 2004). According to Lewin, companies can achieve change through a three-step model: “unfreezing” (Burnes, p.985) or destabilizing the status quo in order to identify a need for change, “moving” (p.985) or transitioning towards developing new behaviours, values and attitudes, and “refreezing” (p.986) the new objectives as the new norms. as an over-simplified approach to change, and in particular, because of its top-down and management-driven focus. According to Lies (2012), the approach to organizational change management has changed from a “unilateral approach to a holistic approach, reflecting the larger management style shift” (p.256). A holistic approach to organizational change efforts requires that organizations not only respond to what Lies calls “hard factors” (changing finances, structures, etc.), but also “soft factors” (changing dynamics, moods, etc.) (Lies, 2012, p.256). This shift also includes bottom-up and employee-led change (Gomes and Kuntz, 2012) and a move towards “flatter hierarchies, less bureaucracy, and a greater willingness to take risks” (Kotter, 1996, p.167). This perspective is important to keep in mind as I look at the current conversation surrounding change management as represented in business publications.

Second, and expanding on the work of Mead (1934), Taylor et al. (2000) and Rogers (1995), a great deal of research speaks to the essential role of leaders during change management efforts. As Kotter (1996) writes, “without enough leaders, the vision, communication, and empowerment that are at the heart of transformation will simply not happen well enough or fast enough to satisfy our needs and expectations,” (p.165). According to many scholars, leaders, whether they are the CEO of the company or the project manager, must be able to ensure there is a buy-in for the proposed change and be able to establish a sense of urgency (Green, 2007; Hioe et al., 2012). According to Baca (2005) “leaders set the context for their team so that the team understands the goals of the project. Leaders motivate and inspire the team to exceed their normal performance ability” (p.16). Research also suggests that leaders need certain soft skills “to disseminate changes throughout organizations and make them stick,” (Hioe et al., 2012, p.98). According to Hioe et al. (2012), these skills include the ability to keep managers and workers inspired, promote collaboration across organizational boundaries and help managers embrace change programs through dialogue. While recommended leadership styles can vary, and do within the literature, most sources agree that genuine, convincing leadership and strong communication with relevant stakeholders are essential to the success of organizational transformation (Baca, 2005; Green, 2007; Hioe et al., 2012).

Human Resources Management

In addition to business management literature that focuses on the shifting style of management and the role of leaders, human resources (here on in referred to as HR) management literature provides a number of key insights into change management.

Definitions

While business management definitions appear to be concerned with the control and organization-wide impact of change management, the HR perspective seems to focus on the process of change. For example, the Society of Human Resources Management defines change management as the “systemic approach and application of knowledge, tools and resources to deal with change. Change management means defining and adopting corporate strategies, structures, procedures and technologies to deal with changes in external conditions and the business environment,” (SHRM, 2013). Meanwhile, Kane (2008) suggests change management is “the all encompassing process by which you confront or overcome challenges or seize new opportunities by transforming an organization from its current state to a state deemed more desirable” (p.vi).

In addition to a focus on process, by using language like “deal with change” (SHRM, 2013) and “confront or overcome challenges or seize new opportunities” (Kane, 2008, p.vi), HR management definitions of change

management also acknowledge the emotional or human side of change. These trends suggest that the HR approach to change management is different from that of business management.

Key Concepts

From an HR management perspective, research tends to focus on the experience of people during the organizational change process. From this perspective, change efforts are seen as challenging because organizations are made up of “people with lots of different views, values, behaviours and interactions,” (Molineux, 2012, p.1588).

According to HR management literature, human behavior is key to the success of change efforts (Duck, 2001; Baca, 2005; Greenfield, 2008). As Duck (2001) writes, “for a change initiative to succeed, the emotional and behavioral aspects must be addressed as thoroughly as the operational issues,” (p.xii).

Many scholars (Lies, 2012; Kane, 2008; Duck, 2001; Rogers, 1995,) acknowledge that people experience change differently, and much of the literature highlights how important it is to think about the roles people play during organizational change efforts. While a number of different terms are used to describe how people react to change, the roles are fairly consistent. Roles can include (1) “early adopters” (Rogers, 1995, p.22) or “can-doers” (Kane, 2008, p.86), people who promote and accept change right away; (2) skeptics (people who question or are skeptical of change); (3) “laggards” (Rogers, 1995, p.22) or

“fence-sitters” (Kane, 2008, p.86), people who slow things down or decelerate change movements; and (4) “nay-sayers” (Kane, 2008, p.87) people who oppose or are cynical about the change. Research suggests that those implementing change must consider and plan for each role or behavior.

Human resources literature also touches on the role of stress during change management efforts. According to Cooper and Taylor (2007), the destabilizing effects of change can “bring feelings of uncertainty and loss of control” which results in high stress levels within organizations (p.68). Duck suggests that workplace stress is usually caused by three factors:

First, high demands are placed on employees and they have little control on what those demands are. Second, high visibility. The actions employees take are being carefully watched and will have real impact on the success of the venture and their careers. Third, concern for competence. People worry that they may not have the skills and abilities to accomplish what needs to be done. (Duck, 2001, p.273).

In times of change, these factors are usually heightened providing even more justification for the human side of change to be considered during any organizational transformation (Cooper & Taylor, 2007; Duck 2001).

For my research, the HR management perspective provides an understanding of the human-side of change management including references to behavior, roles and stress during organizational transitions.

Internal Communication

While the business management and human resources management perspectives offer robust looks at change management, it is important to also visit the somewhat limited literature from the field of internal communication.

Definitions

While the majority of internal communication literature I reviewed did not include definitions on the topic of change management, scholar Lies (2012) writes that change management implies “holistic adjustments of company strategies and structures to general conditions” (p.256) and then expands this definition to suggest that change communication is “an event driven form of internal strategic stakeholder management” (p.256).

While it is hard to compare or contrast this definition to the definitions provided by the business management and HR management perspectives because it is very different in format, it is important to note that Lies’ definition of change communication is about internal stakeholder management, or in other words, how to direct or guide employees.

Key Concepts

Much like business and HR management literature, a number of recurring trends appeared within the internal communication perspective of change management.

First, it seems that many scholars (Lies, 2012; Fumagalli, 2012; Elving, 2005) are arguing that organizations should include communication as part of the strategic planning process for change. According to Fumagalli (2012), “communication offers a strategic contribution to support organizational decision-making processes in a continuously changing environment” (p.483). This means thinking of communication beyond activities or tactics, and focusing on strategy and influence (Elving, 2005; Lies, 2012). In some cases a strategic approach to communication means not just sharing information, but using communication to “create a sense of community” and to build organizational trust and employee commitment (Elving, 2005, p.136). By linking the role of communication to organizational strategy and planning, it appears that internal communication is very much a part of the high-level organizational approach to change, and as such, links directly to the business management perspective.

Second, internal communication research (Tucker et al., 2012; Fumagalli, 2012; Elving, 2005) suggests that effective communication during organizational change can have a direct impact on the change campaign. This trend appears to be particularly true when it comes to managing employee’s change experience as change communication typically comes from management as the sender, and employees as the receiver (Elving, 2005). As Tucker et al. (2012), explain, “providing timely and useful information can help reduce uncertainty and anxiety and increase employees’ trust in those who manage the change” (p.185). In contrast, lack of communication and dishonest or late communication can

negatively impact the success of a change effort (Lies, 2012). Simply put, communication can directly impact an employee's readiness and response to change efforts (Elving, 2005). This link to employee engagement and support through communication highlights an overlap in focus between internal communications and HR literature.

Overall, the internal communication approach to change management is unique when compared to both the business management and HR management perspectives. Whereas business management literature focuses on the shifting management style and role of leaders and HR management literature focuses primarily on the employee experience during change, internal communication literature focuses on the need for strategic communication during change to support both the tactical elements of change, and employee adoption. In other words, it seems to support both the business management approach, and the HR management approach.

Methods

The different views and perspectives explored above enrich the academic conversation on change management. In light of these different views, in this project, I seek to identify the current trends in change management content as found in business publications with a particular emphasis on the role of communication and communicators during organizational change efforts. As such, the research questions that inform this project include:

RQ₁: What are the current trends and key concepts in change management discourse as represented in business publications?

RQ₂: To what extent and how is the role of communication during change management represented in business publications?

In an attempt to construct a meaningful interpretation of current trends in the field of change management, I focused my data collection on articles and blogs from business publications as the primary source of my research because they can be considered an extension of the business management and human resources literature I have reviewed. Furthermore, as they are published on an on-going basis, business publications present an easy to access current reflection on change management discourse.

To construct my data set, I used a document collection method to gather a total of 20 online magazine articles and blogs on the topic of change

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management (see Appendix A). I collected each article and blog online from five of the most established and well-known business publications: *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review (HBR)*, *The Globe and Mail Report on Business*, *Fast Company*, and *Inc. Magazine*. I chose these publications because they are well-established (for example, *Forbes* has been around since 1917, *HBR* since 1994, etc.), and well-read (each receives at least hundreds of thousands if not millions of unique visitors to their websites per month). Furthermore, as the titles noted above continuously showed up in online searches for the top business publications, they are arguably some of the leading business publications in North America.

To find the articles and blogs, I searched for specific key words such as change management, organizational change, and organizational transformation, in the search bars on each of the publications' website. Then, to ensure I captured the most up-to-date, or current content on change management, I only selected articles and blogs that were published within a three-year timeframe: January 2010 to April 2013.

Analytical Method

In order to address the research questions outlined above, my goal was to identify themes and trends in change management discourse, including links to the role of communication during organizational change. To do so, I took a modified grounded theory approach to my analysis and used both open coding and coding influenced by the literature outlined above to identify recurring key words, concepts, trends and ideas as they relate to change management. In an attempt to draw out recurring or common ideas, once I completed all coding, I grouped my codes to develop four main categories, and multiple sub categories as outlined in the following chart (see Table 1):

Table 1: Categories and Codes

Category 1: Leadership	Description	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Role</i> 	The role of a leader in change management efforts. In this case, leadership can refer to executive leadership (i.e. CEOs, Presidents, etc.) as well as project managers.	"You're not just persuading a few people - you are altering the course of your whole company." (Why Companies – Even Yours – Resist Change, <i>Inc. Magazine</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Style</i> 	Leadership style or approach that is recommended during change management.	"The leadership paradigm has had to shift from command and control to participatory leadership." (The Fine Art of Managing Change, <i>The Globe and Mail Report on Business</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Tactic</i> 	Specific tactics or actions leaders should take during change management.	"Leaders must establish relationships first with the people they hope to lead into change, rather than rushing right into doing it."

		(The Skinny on Managing Change, <i>The Globe and Mail Report on Business</i>)
Category 2: Employee Experience	Description	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Emotion/Reaction</i> 	The emotional side of change as experienced by employees within an organization implementing change.	"Not surprisingly, people hear this [the proposed change] as extra work, contributing to the negative perception. Many people add to this the fear of what the change might mean to them personally, which can create actual resistance to change." (Communicating Change as Business as Usual, <i>Harvard Business Review</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Role</i> 	The role of employees during change efforts.	"Your [change] MVPs include every person of influence who plays for your cause...including practical visionaries, frontline executors, partners, thought leaders, technical experts, competitors, detractors, resource provides, political leaders, policy makers, researchers, academicians, alliances, suppliers and vendors." (Organizational Change is Dead, <i>Fast Company</i>)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Adoption Strategy</i> 	Adoption strategies targeted specifically at employees.	"Activate peer pressure...we look to others in our immediate circle for guidance for what are acceptable behaviours." (Ten Ways to Get People to Change, <i>Harvard Business Review</i>)
Category 3:		

Communication	Description	Example
<i>Strategies</i>	High-level communication strategies or approaches during change management efforts.	"Management communications should be short, clear and consistent when explaining the reason for change." (<i>Three Ways to Implement Change, Inc. Magazine.</i>)
<i>Messages</i>	Specific messages that organizations should communicate during change management efforts.	"Look for the bright spots...instead of focusing on what isn't working, you need to shift people over to thinking 'what have we done in the past that has been successful for us.' (<i>How to Get People to Change, Inc. Magazine</i>)
<i>Genre</i>	Specific communication forms or channels that organizations should use during change management efforts.	"Slick, multi-page program overview documents are not nearly as compelling as a direct statement, delivered with conviction." (<i>Three Ways to Implement Change, Inc. Magazine</i>)
Category 4: General Change Strategy	Description	Example
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>General Change Strategy</i> 	General change management strategies that do not clearly fit within the above categories.	"[companies successfully instituted change] by starting with piggybacking on current organizational processes and relationships." (<i>Change Management: Paving the Cowpaths, Fast Company</i>)

Findings

The analysis of my data set has allowed me to identify a number of trends and key concepts that are currently present in change management conversations.

The following table, Table 2, provides a breakdown of the findings and the number of instances of each category from within my data set.

Table 2: Findings

Category 1: Leadership	Total Articles with Instances	Total Instances
• Role	7	14
• Style	7	14
• Tactic	12	19
<i>Category totals:</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>47</i>
Category 2: Employee Experience	Total Articles with Instances	Total Instances
• Emotions/Reactions	7	16
• Role	5	6
• Adoption Strategy	11	21
<i>Category totals:</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>43</i>
Category 3: Communication	Total Articles with Instances	Total Instances
• Strategies	6	17
• Messages	8	12
• Genre	3	5
<i>Category totals:</i>	<i>11</i>	<i>34</i>
Category 4: General Change Strategy	Total Articles with Instances	Total Instances
• General Change Strategy	12	20

Category 1: Leadership

In total, I identified 47 instances relating to leadership within my data set. Of these 47, 14 related to leadership role, 14 related to leadership style and 19 related to leadership tactics.

Leadership Role

Within the leadership role subcategory, two main trends appeared. First, there is a clear shift away from the leader being the only driver of change to having a more collaborative role. As the author of *Change Management is Bigger Than Leadership* writes, "the lead-animal theory is woefully insufficient for changing large organizations or large parts of organizations" (para.2). Alternatively, in *How Not to Manage Organizational Change* the author explores a specific case study in which two leaders took a more collaborative, involved approach and writes: "both executives led from the front. They were front and centre with their people up and down the ranks" (para.12).

Second, there is a clear bias in favour of the leader's role during change to be focused around defining and envisioning change. Two direct quotes from the data set illustrate this nicely. First, the author of *The Basics of Being Strategic About Change* writes, "envision what you're solving for. Only once you have a clear and agreed-on sense of the core challenge you're trying to address can you begin addressing that challenge" (para.6). Additionally, in *Change Management vs. Change Leadership*, the authors write, "Change leadership...is an engine. It's

more about big visions. It's more about empowering lots and lots of people" (para.4).

Leadership Style

The findings surrounding the subcategory of leadership style can be broken into two sections: what not to do and what to do. Within my dataset, a top-down leadership style is greatly discouraged. As the author writes in *How Not To Manage Organizational Change* in reference to a specific case study, "[The change leader] was more a "me-firster" than a "we're in this together" type leader, and when her initiatives did not work as well as conceived, she had no one in her corner" (para.6). In addition, in *The Fine Art of Managing Change*, the author suggests, "we seem to be getting past the leader-as-guru, leader-as-god phenomenon" (para.24).

In addition, my findings suggest that successful leadership style during change includes applying persistent pressure and focusing on the people who are involved in the transition. As the author of *The Skinny on Managing Change* writes, "in these democratic times, change leaders may feel they have to restrain themselves. But leaders must be enforcers - relentlessly applying pressure to achieve their goals" (para.21). Likewise, in *Driving Change Starts With Ignoring Advice on How to Drive Change*, the author writes, "You don't have to be a superstar to be effective; rather you need to work on being a clear-headed,

persistent learner in the setting in which you work, with an eye on the bigger picture” and “model hope and optimism even in the bleakest moment” (para.4, 5).

Leadership Tactics

A number of leadership tactics emerged within my dataset. While there were some examples of tactics that those implementing change should avoid, the majority of tactics were positioned as recommendations for organizations to follow.

According to a number of articles, leaders should avoid providing too much vision and not enough tactics. In other words, leaders need to provide some vision but also focus on specific direction for how to accomplish the desired change. For example, in *How to Get People to Change*, the author writes, “one of the main mistakes is when (sic) leaders come up with a new vision but never translate that broad analytical vision into something the people on the frontlines can actually execute” (para.3).

On the positive side, my data set suggests that leaders should focus on their employee relationships. As the author of *The Skinny on Managing Change* suggests, “leaders must establish relationships first with the people they hope to lead into change, rather than rushing right into doing it” (para.6). Furthermore, leaders should get fully involved in the change efforts and collaborate with staff. In *Driving Change Starts With Ignoring Advice on How to Drive Change*, the author writes, “the effective change leader must actively participate as a learner in helping the organization improve” (para.4). Meanwhile, in *Why We’re So Afraid*

of Change and Why That Holds Business Back, the author suggests “embracing change requires you yourself [the leader] to experience the changes you're asking your organization to undergo” (para.14).

Overall, it is clear that there is a currently major focus on the role of leaders during organizational change. The discussion section of this paper will further explore these findings.

Category 2: Employee Experience

In total, I identified 43 instances relating to employee experience within my data set. Of these 43 instances, 16 related to employee emotions or reactions to change, 6 related to the employee role during change management, and 21 related to employee adoption strategies.

Employee Emotions/Reactions

Seven of the 20 articles in my dataset mentioned the emotions and reactions employees experience during organizational change. Of the 16 instances I noted within these 7 articles, many focused on the presence of resistance to change caused by fear and the idea that change is generally painful. In *Communicating Change as Business as Usual*, the authors explain, "not surprisingly, people hear this [change] as extra work, contributing to the negative perception. Many people add to this the fear of what the change might mean to them personally, which can create actual resistance to change" (para.4). Then, in *How to Anticipate – And*

Deal With – Resistance to Change, the author explains, “change and resistance to change occurs in the context of real people struggling with real (or imagined) issues that have real (or imagined) consequences” (para.1).

In addition, the focus on the pain or emotional difficulty caused by change is reflected in the following passages from *Why We’re So Afraid of Change And Why That Holds Businesses Back*:

Growing research from the neurosciences and cognitive sciences reveal that change really is difficult for humans. Your brain hates change. When you're learning something new, your prefrontal cortex must work very hard as you experiment with unfamiliar ideas (para.7, 9).

Based on these findings, it is clear that employee emotions and reactions are a big part of change management content.

Employee Role

Despite the high number of instances relating to the employee reaction to change, there were only a few instances relating to the role employees should take during organizational transformation. According to my dataset, employees should play an active role in organizational change. In *Change Management vs. Change Leadership*, the author suggests, “[change] is done with little change management groups inside corporations...it's done with task forces that are basically given the whole goal of push this thing along, but keep it under control.” The author of *Organizational Change is Dead* suggests that employees can take on a number of roles, “your [change] MVPs include every person of influence who plays for your cause...including practical visionaries, frontline executers,

partners, thought leaders, technical experts, competitors, detractors, resource provides, political leaders, policy makers, researchers, academicians, alliances, suppliers and vendors" (para.5).

Employee Adoption Strategies

With 21 total instances, Employee Adoption Strategies is the Employee Experience subcategory with the highest occurrences, the majority of which focus on recommended strategies for employee adoption. A total of five different recurring strategies materialized within my data set.

The first strategy is to capitalize on social influence or peer pressure. For example, as the author of *10 Ways to Activate Change* writes, "activate peer pressure...we look to others in our immediate circle for guidance for what are acceptable behaviours" (para.6). Indeed, this finding is echoed by the author of *How to Get People to Change* who reinforces this idea by explaining that "social influence is strong...sometimes just understanding that a crowd of people is moving in a direction makes people uncomfortable enough to change" (para.13).

The second strategy is to focus on one change at a time. In *Ten Ways to Get People to Change*, the author suggests, "embrace the power of one...Focus on one behaviour to change at a time" (para.30). Or in other words, as the author of *The Skinny on Managing Change* puts it, "give them a new experience in relatively non-threatening circumstances, and then build on those experiences" (para.6).

The third recurring employee adoption strategy is to be specific. For example, in *Ten Ways to Get People to Change*, the author suggests “making it sticky...for a goal to be effective, it needs to be concrete and measureable... 'listen actively' is vague and not measureable. 'Paraphrase what other said and check for accuracy' is concrete and measureable" (para.4). Further to this point, in *How to Get People to Change*, the authors explain “very often we paralyze our analytical side by offering it too much to analyze. The same thing happens if you give your employees too many things to think about" (para.7).

The fourth strategy focuses on using reward systems to engage employees in change efforts. According to the author of *Change Management is Bigger Than Leadership*, this is as simple as implementing rewards such as financial benefits. Meanwhile, the author of *10 Ways to Get People to Change* suggests incentives such as pay, bonuses or promotions.

The fifth and most common employee adoption strategy focuses on experiential learning. As the authors of *Why We're So Afraid of Change – And Why That Holds Businesses Back* write, "you have to see and feel new ways of doing things, not just read about them. Experiential learning is critical" (para.10). Furthermore, in *Change Management, Paving the Cowpaths*, the author writes, "[when] system users experience the early benefits of the new system, they become much more willing and motivated to change their practices to take advantage of the powerful new possibilities" (para.12).

Much like the findings on leadership during change, it is clear that the employee experience is a major focus of the current change management conversation.

Category 3: Communication

In total, I identified 34 instances relating to communication within my data set. Of these 34, 17 related to communication strategies, 12 related to communication messages and five related to communication genre.

Communication Strategies

Within the subcategory of communication strategies, a number of recurring themes or ideas appeared. First, the need for positive framing, celebrating change or positioning the change in a positive light appeared in a number of articles. For example, in *Communicating Change As Business As Usual*, the author writes, "proven tactics used by companies who are successful at change include setting clear and high aspirations for change and communicating the need for change in a positive way" (para.7). In addition, in *3 Ways to Implement Change*, the author suggests that success and changes should be "celebrated at the key milestones, as well as in the end result...as this is where project leadership and communication have the greatest impact" (para.9).

Second, constant communication is another recurring strategy that appeared within my data set. As the authors put it in *How to Anticipate – And*

Better Deal With – Resistance to Change, "you'll likely need to explain your change plans over and over and over again" (para.3). Similarly, in *Obama's Change Management Scorecard*, the author suggests that "what the Obama team might have missed however is the need to keep making the case for change over time rather than assume people understood it in the first place" (para.3).

Finally, the use of dialogue or two-way communication appeared in a number of articles. In *The Skinny on Managing Change*, the author writes "you must communicate during the change efforts - and it must not be top-down communication, but two-way, as the leader listens, explains, encourages and adjusts" (para.16). This is further reflected in *How to Anticipate – And Better Deal With – Resistance to Change* as the author writes "listen more, talk less. Engage people in conversations about their work. Ask questions that prime the pump for dialogue" (para.9).

Communication Messages

Next, within the communication message subcategory, I noted two recurring trends. This first is framing change as a constant occurrence within organizations. In *Communicating Change As Usual*, the author explains "a change readiness approach is dynamic and proactive, positioning change simply as business as usual. Making this part of your company all comes down to how it's communicated" (para.2).

The second recurring idea was the importance of communicating the vision or hoped-for future for the change. Two articles articulated this very strongly. In *The Basics of Being Strategic About Change*, the author writes, “get clear about your hoped-for future. Having and consistently articulating a clear sense of your hoped-for future for the business gives your employees a positive frame for action and offers an antidote to fear” (para.8). In addition, in *Obama’s Change Management Scorecard*, the author writes, “create a vision of what will be different. Once people are open to the idea of change, they then need to know what things will look like when a particular change has been accomplished” (para.4).

Communication Genres

Finally, within the main communication category, the communication genre subcategory had the least amount of total instances. However, the data set suggest certain genres that organizations should and should not use when communicating change.

In *How to Better Anticipate – And Deal With – Resistance to Change*, the author writes, “don’t simply make a presentation and expect people to click their heels and salute” (para.5). Furthermore, in *3 Ways to Implement Change*, the author writes, “slick, multi-page program overview documents are not nearly as compelling as a direct statement, delivered with conviction” (para.4). And finally, in *Driving Change Starts By Ignoring Advice on How to Drive Change*, the author

suggests creating a “feedback loop in which you tweak your change efforts as you learn from the results generated” (para.9).

As will be further explored in my discussion section, it is clear that while communication appears to have a role in the current change management conversation, it does not seem to be the focus.

Category 4: General Change Strategies

In total, I identified 20 instances relating to general change strategies within my data set, each focusing on what organizations should do when implementing change. Within this sub category, three trends emerged.

First is a focus on making small changes to the environment to make larger changes within the organization. Interestingly enough, my findings suggest that this approach can support employee engagement. As the author of *10 Ways to Get People to Change* writes, “tweak the situation...you nudge people not by telling them directly, but indirectly, by shaping their choices” (para.8). This idea is reinforced in *Change Management is Bigger Than Leadership* when the author writes, “one leads change by changing the systems that comprised the work environment around the people whose behavior is supposed to change” (para.3).

Second, many articles suggest that change strategies need to be defined and simplified. In *Change Management Needs to Change*, the authors suggest, “there are many [change] frameworks, languages and tools to choose from. The key is to have a common set of definitions, approaches and simple checklists that everyone is familiar with” (para.6). This idea is echoed in *The Skinny on*

Managing Change when the author writes, "...fat plans don't work - the skinnier, the better. It's best to start implementing, and fix what isn't working, than get hung up on developing elaborate plans" (para.10).

Third and finally, is a trend towards incorporating organizational context into a change movement. In *Change Management, Paving the Cowpaths*, the author suggests that companies that successfully institute change start with "piggybacking on current organizational processes and relationships" (para.13). Indeed, as the authors of *The Basics of Being Strategic About Change* write, "know where you are starting from. Once you're clear on your challenge, it's important to have an accurate and balanced picture of your current reality relative to that challenge" (para.7).

Discussion

Analysis of my data set reveals a number of trends in change management content, many of which reflect the main change management perspectives (business management, HR management and internal communication). In the following section, I will discuss my findings as they relate to my research questions.

RQ, Findings: Current trends and key concepts in change management discourse as represented in business publications

The results of this study suggest there is a growing consensus among change management scholars that two factors are critical to any change effort: leadership and the experience of employees. Both factors appeared within 80% (16 out of 20) of my data set, suggesting that currently there is a major focus on both factors. Interestingly enough, while a number of instances were framed in the positive (i.e. what organizations should do with leaders and employees to successfully implement change), approximately 13% of total instances were framed in the negative, providing caution for what organizations should not do. This trend suggests the challenge of implementing change and the reality that many change programs continue to fail, providing insight or guidance into what not to do.

Within the leadership sphere, the category with the highest level of references, instances were almost even across the board between leadership role (14 instances), style (14 instances) and tactics (19 instances). While no

surprise, this finding demonstrates a strong bias within business publications towards the business management literature perspective and reflects the research of a number of business literature scholars presented above which focus on the essential role of leaders during change management (Kotter, 1996; Green, 2007; Hioe et al, 2012).

Within the employee sphere, the category with the second highest level of references, the majority of instances (21 out of 43) focused on employee adoption strategies. While my findings also reflect a focus on how employees react to change (16 instances), most articles take the conversation further by suggesting strategies and tactics to help employees cope with change and adopt changes. Despite this focus on employee reactions and employee adoption strategies only a select number of articles explicitly suggested the role employees should take during organizational change. This implies that employees may still play a more passive part in the change process. Overall, the high number of instances relating to the employee experience suggests there is currently a very strong influence of human resources management within change management discourse.

RQ2: The extent to which and how the role of communication during change management is represented in business publications

While my findings suggest there is a role for communication during organizational change, the fact that communication was only referenced in 55% (11 of 20) of articles suggests that business publications are not prioritizing the

role of communication during change management. In other words, communication does not seem to be an “on trend” topic in the current change management conversation.

Of the 34 instances of communication found in my data set, the majority referred to communication strategies, or high-level ways to approach communication during change. These results reflect the internal communication literature explored above (Lies, 2012; Fumagalli, 2012; Elving, 2005) that argues communication should be part of the strategic planning process of change efforts.

The second most common reference to communication was content relating to communication messages. Of the two noted trends, (1) the importance of communicating vision and hoped-for future, and (2) the importance of framing change as a constant reality, I find the latter most interesting as it suggests that change efforts are becoming the norm within organizations and should not be overly built up or sensationalized as something new.

Finally, the overall lack of specific communication tactics or genres (limited to 5 total instances) referenced in my data set suggests two things: first, the aforementioned lack of focus on communication during change management, and second, where business publications do mention communication, they take a high-level or strategic approach to communicating during change, avoiding tactical or specific communication actions.

Implications and Best Practices

Based on my findings, I have developed the following change management best practices for both the general approach to change management as well as the role of communication during organizational change efforts. These best practices reflect the current conversation surrounding change management. Leaders, project managers and communication professionals involved in organizational transformation could use these best practices as guidelines when implementing change programs.

General Change Management

During change management efforts, leaders should:

- Define and envision the change.
- Inspire with vision and drive action with defined tactics.
- Apply persistent pressure.
- Focus on the employee experience.
- Build relationships with staff.
- Get involved and collaborate.

During change management efforts, leaders should not:

- Expect to drive the change alone.
- Take a top-down approach.

During change management efforts, employees:

- May experience pain and resistance.
- Should be engaged in change through:
 - The social influence of peer pressure.
 - Reward systems.
 - Experiential learning.
 - Respectful treatment.
 - Specific and measurable change tactics.
 - Altering the environment around them.

Communication and Change Management

Change communication should:

- Be considered in the strategic planning phase of any change management effort.
- Be positioned in a positive way.
- Include focused messages about the vision of the change and the hoped-for future.
- Be consistent and on-going.
- Be structured as two-way or dialogue based.

Change communication should not:

- Be top-down, one-way communication.
- Be limited to one-time tactics such as presentations or memos.

Conclusion

From the aforementioned essential role of leaders, to the focus on employee experience, this research project suggests business journalists and bloggers are discussing a number of topics in change management content. The findings reveal a present bias towards both the business management and human resources management perspectives, leaving some, albeit limited, room for the internal communications perspective and the role of communication. Regardless, this study suggests communication should have a role during organizational change. The lack of focus on communication in both the literature and my data set points to an area of further research and study.

Overall, this study on current trends in change management provides a look at the present-day focus of the field and provides best practices for any organization facing change.

Appendix A

Document Analysis – Table of Change Management Blog and Articles

Title	Author	Date	Publication
3 Ways to Implement Change	Tom Searcy	June 28, 2012	Inc. Magazine
How to Get People to Change	Bobbie Gossage	Feb. 1, 2010	Inc. Magazine
Why Companies – Even Yours – Resist Change	Samuel Bacharach	May 2, 2013	Inc. Magazine
Communicating Change as Business As Usual	Chris Muselwhite and Tammie Plouffe	July 19, 2011	Harvard Business Review Blog Network
Ten Ways to Get People to Change	Morten T. Hansen	Sept. 21, 2012	Harvard Business Review Blog Network
This is Your Brain on Organizational Change	Walter McFarland	Oct. 16, 2012	Harvard Business Review Blog Network
Change Management is Bigger than Leadership	Gregory Shea and Cassie Solomon	March 29, 2013	Harvard Business Review Blog Network
Change Management Needs to Change	Ron Ashkenas	April 16, 2013	Harvard Business Review Blog Network
The Skinny on Managing Change	Harvey Schachter	Aug. 23, 2012	The Globe and Mail Report on Business
The Fine Art of Managing Change	Gordon Pitts	Aug. 23, 2012	The Globe and Mail Report on Business
Driving Change Starts with Ignoring Advice on How to Drive Change	Harvey Schachter	Sept. 10, 2012	The Globe and Mail – Report on Business
Why We're So Afraid of Change – And Why That Holds Businesses Back	Andrea Simon	April 8, 2013	Forbes
The Basics of Being Strategic About Change	Erika Andersen	Aug. 9, 2010	Forbes
How NOT to Manage	John Baldoni	April 8, 2013	Forbes

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Organizational Change			
Obama's Change Management Scorecard	Ron Ashkenas	May 11, 2011	Forbes
Change Management vs. Change Leadership	John Kotter	July 12, 2011	Forbes
Dear Leaders, You Have to Change Too	Arnold Beekes	April 13, 2010	Fast Company
How to Better Anticipate –And Deal With – Resistance to Change	Rodget Dean Duncan	Sept. 20, 2012	Fast Company
Organizational Change is Dead	Seth Kahan	Jan. 28, 2011	Fast Company
Change Management: Paving the Cowpaths	Jonathan Byrnes	July 28, 2011	Fast Company

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