

Chapter 13

MODELS OF CHANGE, ORGANIZATIONAL REDESIGN, AND THE ADOPTION OF WEB TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract: Theories of organizational design provide limited guidance in the ongoing adjustment to web technologies. There is also a gap between the rather sophisticated theories of change that analyze how and why change occurs and the practice-oriented focus of the implementation and guidance of actual change processes. This chapter attempts to close this gap by illustrating how recent developments in change theory may be useful in understanding the actual adoption and implementation of emergent Internet technologies. Empirically, the paper draws on two surveys of Internet-technology adoption by Nordic banks and manufacturers. The theoretical point of departure is Van de Ven and Poole's (1995) identification of four basic types of change processes: life cycle, teleological, dialectical, and evolutionary change. These theories all encapsulate planned organizational change in that they can explain actual processes and outcomes, including how organizational change emerges and develop in adapting to Internet technology based on characteristics of organizations at different stages of Internet adoption. They may also help to explain the apparently small impact of participation. In a practical perspective, they can enrich the perceptions of participants in actual projects. On this basis we argue for more comprehensive diagnostic models of organizational change.

Key words: Change Models, Implementation, Innovation Adoption, Organizational Change, Organizational Redesign, Participative decision making, Web Technology

1. INTRODUCTION

Implicit in organization design theory is a model of adaptation. Change in environmental factors may lead to a misfit between structure and

environment which in turn make organizations change to another fit (Donaldson, chapter in this volume). However, other theories have given adaptation processes more attention. How are external impulses for change transformed into actual changes in an organization and how can the change processes be analyzed? This is a major questions that organizational researchers have tried to answer from many different perspectives. Even when the focus is limited to technology and administrative changes, the literature provides diverse descriptive and prescriptive views ranging from innovation diffusion to adjustment of administrative procedures. These views may emphasize deterministic technology-push approaches as well as voluntaristic and strategic approaches.

Theories of organization design have taught us that the alignment of structural elements, technology, and environment may be important to organizational performance. Despite criticisms of neglecting processes of voluntary actions and social construction, organizational contingency theory has provided empirical evidence of the validity of several major relationships between contingency factors and structure (Donaldson, 1995). However, the design of organizations is never a result of a once and for all architectural decision. Design of organizations is mainly a result of redesigning processes where changes take existing structures and contingencies as its point of departure. Thus, both proper diagnosing of organizational problems, as well as the process of connecting diagnoses to change, become central in establishing a desirable fit.

By taking this focus this article is closely in line with Snow, Miles, and Miles (chapter of this volume) who recommend redesign and organizational change as important parts of initiatives for organization design research. Neither traditional design theories nor traditional theories of organizational change have offered more than crude prescriptions of the management of the transitions to new organizational forms. In textbooks on organizational change and development open-systems models appear as rather simple diagnostic models (e.g. Cummings and Worley, 2005). This gives a practical enumeration of factors to take into account but in order to explain complex changes more complex models are needed. In particular, the link between levels in multilevel approaches needs more attention. For example, how do upper level changes affect changes in specific operating procedures and what role does participation play? Furthermore, change may be seen from several different perspectives and shouldn't it be possible to exploit the multiple contributions from different theoretical approaches?

The article shows that the interplay between new information technology and organizational change can be analyzed from a comprehensive range of theoretical perspectives without completely losing theoretical parsimony or practical relevance. This is illustrated by examples of the adoption and