Recasting educational administration programs as learning organizations

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The purpose of this paper is to present a model for overcoming traditional, culturally rooted resistance to change in educational administration programs. Universities that are unable to change operate as dysfunctional organizations and display symptoms that reflect addictive behavior. Healthy organizations facilitate change and adapt to evolving contexts. Conceptualizes change as having its genesis in a learning organizational model. The learning organization model aligns the three existing cultures inherent in universities and educational administration programs. By aligning the operator, engineer, and executive cultures within the university, microstructures such as educational administration programs are able to embrace the chaotic temperament inherent in the university and evolve into a generative environment that moves from linear construction toward a fuzzy adaptation to changing contexts.

Understanding change

Research efforts to overcome resistance to change are the focus of sustained efforts to reform and renew educational administration programs (Calabrese and Straut, 1999; Hallinger and Murphy, 1991; Milstein and Krueger, 1997; Murphy, 1992). Researchers, concerned with reform, cite an array of issues focusing on people, programs, and a knowledge base. Yet, despite the constant attention given to the inadequacy of preparation programs, educational administration faculty seldom create change. Rather than frame faculty as change resistors, it is more appropriate to create conditions where faculty are part of the change process.

Faculty reticence to become involved in change is due to confusion over the meaning of change. Change, as a verb, means to cause to be different. It implies action as in the state of transforming an object from one condition to another. Ice melting into water is an example of the action nature of change. The subject can initiate the change action or the action may be external to the object without the subject having any control over the action. In either case, action is occurring on a subject and the subject is different because of the action. As a noun, change implies an act or a process that results in a modification, alteration, or substitution of its previous status. There is a transition in the subject from one state to another. For example, a change of state is when water freezes and changes into ice.

We define change as a dynamic process entered into by a person or group that transcends their existing state. Thus, change operates as a noun and verb. Acting as a noun and verb, change comprises four specific actions: the recognition that the current state needs modification or replacement; the identification of a desired outcome; the initiation of the process to achieve the outcome; and the flexibility to employ an adaptive process to achieve the outcome (Robbins, 1991).

The failure to understand change as a noun and verb compromises efforts to change. For example, when the concept of change means abandoning one way of acting and replacing it with another way, some interpret change to mean taking one’s identity and replacing it with another. In an organizational sense, members frustrated with existing conditions compete with those satisfied with the existing state. The need for change is set aside and replaced with a power struggle for political control over identity. Here, dominant groups define identity and the direction of change. Any victory is temporary since the oppressed group, rather than co-operating with the dominant group, subverts the change and waits to regain power. Covey (1989) sees this as a dysfunctional paradigm that stifles cooperation.

This dysfunctional paradigm resists dynamic change. In effect, the organization’s desire for stability and balance directs change resistance, making support for change directly proportional to the organization’s age. Over time, the organization creates a set of rules that resist change and rapid adaptation to the environment. The resistance to change is evidence of the organization’s need for stability. The organization’s need for stability creates, in Senge’s (1990) words, a condition of compensating feedback. Compensating feedback is an unforeseen and opposite reaction to the original intention.
For example, when two professors present a plan for radical program change to their colleagues, they meet resistance and see their plan put aside for future study, review, or modifications thus emasculating the plan regardless of the plan’s merit. The resistance often ignores the need for change and creates a condition jeopardizing the organization’s health. Organizations that act this way are dysfunctional.

### Dysfunctional organizations

Dysfunctional organizations appear to operate normally. On closer examination the organization’s efficiency, member morale, and expected outcomes are anomalous. Dysfunctional conditions create and sustain a set of change inhibitors. Argyris (1990) identified seven change inhibitors common to all dysfunctional organizations: inflexibility, inability to recognize member needs, uncooperative and unconcerned leadership, dysfunctional communication patterns, lack of long-term and strategic planning, non-existent trust among members and leaders, and ignorance of the need for change.

Conversely, healthy organizations create and sustain change facilitators. Change facilitators, according to Sorohan (1994), encourage open communications, promote high levels of involvement, sustain learning and renewal, support values promoting diversity, maintain fairness and equity in actions, provide for security needs, make work meaningful, encourage a balance between work and family life, and use technology as a tool. Change facilitators are absent in dysfunctional behavior.

The dysfunctional behavior in organizations is addictive. Schaeff and Fassell (1988) suggest that the same patterns of behavior witnessed in people with addictions exist in organizations. Schaeff and Fassell (1988, p. 147) state:

Adictive organizations are always on the lookout for the “quick fix”, and anything that may provide temporary relief or solutions is leaped upon gladly, even if it is not congruent with their mission.

The addictive organization resists alterations to patterns of behavior. The organization suffers from self-absorption operating as a closed system that alienates members from each other and from those depending on the organization (Kung, 1976). The addictive nature of dysfunctional organizations is consistent with behavior found in non-learning organizations. A non-learning organization is averse to examining its long-held assumptions regarding beliefs, behaviors, and rules. Its aversion to learning and growth affects its relationships with its members and other organizations. A non-learning organization stifles change and punishes those advocating change.

Lewin (1948) points out that efforts to change in non-supportive environments fail. This is true in nature as well as organizations. Long-term change in educational administration occurs in a university environment that encourages, supports, and nurtures change. Here, both the university and the educational administration program are learning organizations operating with a sense of mutuality.

Learning organizations that sustain long-term change are competent. Argyris (1990) defines a competent organization as being able to solve problems so that the problems remain solved and the organization’s capacity to solve future problems increases. The ability to solve future problems is an act of competence and relates to survival. In an environment where rapid change is the norm, competence is essential if an organization is to survive (Larsen, 1999). A learning organization’s creative capacity is a mark of its competence. Senge (1990, p. 14) states:

Survival learning or what is more often termed adaptive learning is important – indeed it is necessary. But for a learning organization, adaptive learning must be joined by generative learning, learning that enhances our capacity to create.

Generative learning is the ability to become aware of a problem and then to discover new ways of considering and recognizing the problem (Schein, 1994). This is also known as double-loop learning and learning how to learn (Argyris and Schon, 1974). Argyris (1976) indicates that double-loop learning identifies both espoused theories and the theories in use. Espoused theories are what the organization says it is doing. Theories in use are what the organization actually does. Alignment of espoused and in use theories is crucial to double-loop learning.

To the extent that colleges and schools of education and universities are learning organizations, they are able to align espoused theories with theories in use. This alignment, however, seldom occurs. Argyris (1999, p. 58) states:

In real life, most organizations exhibit powerful organizational defensive routines. … Defensive routines are created because the participants believe that they are necessary for themselves and for the organization to survive.

Schein (1999) indicates that much of the learning among participants arises from occupational communities rather than the organization. For example, professors align themselves by field rather than organization.
If we consider cross-cultural alignment by professional field, then change issues among professors in America may be similar to those in other non-American universities. For example, Lueddeke (1999) suggests that organizations are aware of the need to change, models for teaching and learning continue as they have for years. University faculty orient themselves toward a professional research context and neglect or ignore the demands of their constituents (Gilliland, 1997). Universities and university programs need to recognize and align espoused theories and theories in use in order to change. Recognizing the differences between espoused theories and theories in use, however, is difficult at best because of institutional denial.

**Mental models**

Models from cognitive social psychology and organizational culture explain institutional denial as a way that dysfunctional organizations mask responsibility for behavior. Dysfunctional organizations suppress the desire to acquire perception accuracy. These organizations follow a predetermined map or model that serves as reality. These maps, to the degree that they do not match what exists, distort reality (Bandler and Grinder, 1975). Maps distort reality because the information used to create the map is inaccurate. Ironically, many people and organizations believe the inaccurate map to be accurate and unwittingly make decisions that lack a rational basis. Organizational or personal beliefs and values act like switches to construct reality in given situations filtering the information flow for the creation of the map (James and Woodsmall, 1988).

These maps become the mental models that the organization constructs to make sense out of the world. Senge (1990, p. 175) states: [Mental models are] simple generalizations such as “people are untrustworthy”, or they can be complex theories, such as my assumptions about why members of my family interact as they do. But what is important to grasp is that mental models are active – they shape how we act.

The existence of mental models suggests lack of alignment between espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris, 1976). The consequence of holding on to these mental models undermines attempts at reform and the critical examination of program outcomes from a systems perspective. These mental models, in Lewin’s (1948) words, are frozen. Frozen mental models need to experience unfreezing. The process of unfreezing and refreezing according to Schein (1997a) is a painful process. Schein (1997a) suggests that creating the conditions for unfreezing requires disconfirming information, the creation of guilt or survival anxiety, mastering learning distress, cognitive redefinition, and the identification with a positive or negative role model. Conversely, changing the mental models held by organizations stimulates growth and transforms the organization’s learning environment (Senge, 1990).

Most mental models operate below the level of formal consciousness and are a patterned way of acting, knowing, and responding to external stimuli. Becoming aware of these mental models is a first step in unfreezing fixed patterns of action (Schein, 1997a). Unfreezing is necessary to raise consciousness to patterns of resistance to change that exists in many educational administration programs. Identifying these patterns of resistance, although easily seen from a detached position, is difficult for those immersed in the organization’s ethos.

The difficulty of identifying patterns of resistance results from member behavior that sustains and fosters the organization. Fromm (1994) says that every society or group uses its value system to produce the kinds of people and outcomes that it needs. If the goal of the organization is to sustain its inherent value structure, it is difficult and painful for members to recognize dysfunctional behavior. To search for and recognize patterns of resistance requires recognizing current reality and letting go of an illusory reality which occurs through reflective awareness. Reflective awareness is a critical component in constructive change. Entering into reflective awareness is a challenge to faculty and the university.

**The challenge of change**

There is a distinction of not knowing what or how to change and not wanting to change. Frequently, those not wanting to change may not know how to change. Change agents interpret these actions as resistance to change. Resistance to change according to Schein (1994) is a belief that the acquisition of new knowledge and learning its application is more painful than maintaining current practice. Schein (1994) refers to this stage as level one anxiety. Those with level one anxiety have a sense of instability, chaos, and lack of control over the outcome of proposed change. University faculty who have not kept abreast of evolving demands may not understand what personal or program changes are made. Further, if they understand what changes to make, their knowledge base may not have the capacity to conceptualize how the change is to take place. Thus, their anxiety regarding change prevents movement to change. Level two anxiety is the realization that change is essential for
survival. For change to take place, level two anxiety must be greater than level one anxiety. Essentially, the fear not to change has to be greater than the fear to change.

Level one anxiety among members of educational administration programs is subjective; it exists in the members’ personal experience. Since each member’s experience is subjective, the member constructs a personal memory based on his or her experience (Kostere and Malatesta, 1989). For example, a professor may remember his or her experience as a principal. Although this experience may be more than 20 years old, the professor assumes that it is the model for students studying to be a principal. The same professor believes that the change process to alter the conventional educational administration program is time and energy cost-ineffective. Thus, anxiety one levels far outweigh anxiety two levels. The professor experiences resistance to change arising out of his or her fear of not knowing how to change. The professor’s immediate response is to defend an archaic value system. Change agents interpret this defensive reaction as change resistance.

Unfortunately, university faculty experiencing level one anxiety have a reputation as change resisters. Some reform researchers accuse these members of having their experience formed by tradition, comfort, timidity, and intellectual laziness (Eurich, 1969). Change agents view these members as passively awaiting directions. It is “for many, simply a means of a cleaning and oiling that will make the clock run more perfectly than before” (Merton, 1971, p. 19). Change agents are impatient with members experiencing level one anxiety. They believe that resistance to change is unrealistic in a society demanding that organizations adapt to meet the rapid developments occurring on social and economic levels.

As anxiety level one increases, those fearing change actively maintain the status quo and frustrate reform efforts. The fear of change results in dysfunctional behaviors by denying that anything is wrong, projecting blame for existing problems to external causes, and covering up actions. Kuhn (1970, p. 78) points out that defenders of existing paradigms “will devise numerous articulations and ad hoc modifications of their theory in order to eliminate any apparent conflict”. Change becomes impossible because values are stuck or frozen. Lewin (1948) asserts that change cannot take place unless those who need to change give up their hostility to the new set of values consistent with the change.

The change-minded professor encounters colleagues overwhelmed with level one anxiety and a program caught between demands of external agencies and the bureaucratic addictive nature of the university. The most visible hindrance for the change-minded professor is the level one anxiety colleague. This focus, however, is misplaced. The actual transformational barrier is a systems understanding of the nature of change.

The university and change: the three university cultures

Alignment of the three university cultures must occur before individual commitment to the learning that undergirds change. Schein (1997b) identifies three organizational cultures as the operator, engineering, and the executive cultures. Applying Schein’s conceptualization of three organizational cultures explains the slow process of change at the university level. Faculty adopt the operator culture. Faculty take the raw material of the university and work with it to turn out a product—graduates. Deans, department chairs, and other mid-level managers embrace the engineering culture. They manage the operations of the university and work with faculty to implement university policy. The university trustees, president, and provost embrace the executive culture and function to secure funding, create policies that sustain growth, and seek to promote university influence. Each culture has a different mission and vision. Each culture seeks to have the other two cultures act in supportive ways. Conflict between cultures exists because of the misalignment of the mission and goals of each culture.

The university lacks organizational integrity without cultural alignment. As a result, fragmentation occurs. The fragmented university appears as three diverse cultures pursuing separate conflicting ends. The intensity of the pursuit of these ends blinds each culture to each other’s needs. When one culture needs the assistance of another culture to achieve its ends, it meets resistance. The motivation of the resisting culture is not malicious. Rather, the motivation is a result of the imposition of values by the imposing culture that are different from the values held by the members of the receiving culture (Lewin, 1948). Further, resistance motivation also stems from a conflict of competing ends. The most popular means of overcoming resistance motivation is through the politics of power and domination (fight). If power and domination fail, then the receiving culture isolates and insulates itself from outside intrusion (flight).

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Applying what we know about change to the university

Alignment of the three cultures is essential to create constructive, long-term change. Alignment requires a process that facilitates the identification of each culture's operating patterns and rules. This process is almost non-existent in the university. Schein (1997b, p. 10) states:

Schein (1997b) further suggests that generative learning is essential to the change process.

The following seven guidelines act as a catalyst to create a generative learning environment that seeks an alignment of the three cultures as an essential outcome:

1. Members of each culture must be free from attack to sustain change. When under attack, the primary response is to defend or retreat. Groups define the battleground, devise strategies and tactics, and identify objectives. Eventually the battle is over and the will of the winning group defines the peace process. The victors win and the vanquished continue to resist. A learning organization, however, creates an environment where members openly discuss the panoply of perspectives.

2. The organization structure must support change. We know that change succeeds if the person or organizational unit receives support and encouragement from its surrounding environment. On the other hand, change dies for lack of support. If an educational administration faculty desires to change, it is likely that the faculty will forgo the pain associated with the change process if the university does not support the faculty. In effect, the lack of support marginalizes faculty. A learning organization creates an environment that addresses the anxiety involved in the change.

3. University members must work together to identify a common perspective of reality. Each culture has its perception of reality. Each perception is a subjective interpretation of reality based on cultural values and beliefs. When a culture has a faulty perception of reality, the other cultures cannot alter the faulty perception through the application of facts. A learning organization encourages dialogue to discover the values, beliefs, and knowledge base that support the faulty perception. Once an understanding of the faulty perception exists, the culture with the accurate perception can offer, in Lewin’s word, disinformation and an invitation to join a supportive group.

4. True change occurs simultaneously at many levels. Organizational change takes place at the member’s conscious level, subconscious level, and in the member’s set of actions. Change requires the conscious desire to change. This conscious desire to change aligns previously held values and ways of thinking to a new set of values and ways of thinking. The ego and superego of the organization agree to what is important. This conscious and subconscious agreement manifests itself in action as new programs, new ways of behaving and thinking. A learning organization patiently works with and coaches members to commit to change. This process aligns new values with held values, and permits a testing period for members to apply new ways of thinking and acting.

5. Awareness of the present is essential to change. Effective change occurs when organizational members are aware of their present behavior and the consequences of their behavior. Awareness is coupled with responsibility. Taking responsibility for behavior and related outcomes is a starting point for change. Members develop a reference point designing and adopting new values, beliefs, and ways of thinking. A learning organization collectively becomes aware of individual and collective behaviors and the outcomes associated with these behaviors. There is responsibility coupled with awareness and duty.

6. Dialogue is essential to awareness and assumption of responsibility. Dialogue is at the core of a learning organization. Dialogue embodies the qualities of honesty, trust, and receptivity. It embodies honesty because each person expresses the truth about an issue as he or she understands the issue. It embodies trust because each person feels what he or she has to say will not lead to condemnation. It embodies receptivity because each person receives each other’s comments as honest and dedicated to generative learning. Dialogue that embodies these qualities leads to the awareness of the accurate perception of reality. A learning organization encourages dialogue in a guided safe environment. A safe environment is free from judgment, condemnation, accusations, and retribution.

7. Emptiness is essential to change. A container filled with water cannot hold additional liquid. This image applies to university faculty. Learning implies emptiness at one level and a deep hunger
at another level. One has to be empty and hungry to learn. The hungrier the person, the greater his or her desire for food or learning. Acknowledgement of emptiness is a courageous act of the person and of the academic unit. It is an acknowledgement that growth is necessary. It is an acknowledgement that self-sufficiency is inadequate. Emptiness coupled with hunger becomes the motivation for change and the openness to new possibilities and the readiness to generative learning.

### Summary
Change in the university seems slow and difficult. Many faculty concerned with the pace of change bond together to seek support for change initiatives. Change initiatives, however, encounter great resistance. The result is a zero sum contest producing only winners and losers. A more beneficial way of considering change in the university is to understand the nature of the three cultures that comprise university membership: the operator, engineering, and executive cultures. When these cultures align, change occurs throughout the university system. When these cultures are out of alignment, the university lacks system integrity. Aligning these cultures results in systemic growth and the creation of a learning organization. At the core of this learning organization is generative learning anchored in dialogue, awareness, responsibility, and emptiness.

### References
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