LEADING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE: THE ROLE OF TRANSFORMATION THEORY AND EMOTIONAL LEADERSHIP

By

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Abstract

Organizations in every sector of the workforce are faced with mounting pressure to change. Individuals and organizations alike must learn how to adapt and change in order to sustain their competitive advantage in an increasingly diverse world. For many people, learning to change is an anxiety provoking process that becomes a debilitating fear. The fear of learning as an adult and the fear of change compounded by poor organizational leadership poses the greatest challenges towards successful organizational change. With only thirty percent of change programs leading to successful reforms, there must be something missing from the current process of leading change in the workplace. Following critical theory, this paper will assess the literature on organizational change and outline strategic limitations that exist within the current understanding of how change is facilitated. It will be argued that in order for organizations to successfully change, they must engage in three key processes of transformative learning, transformative leadership and psychological safety of self-efficacious development. The Atomic Model of Organizational Change will be introduced as an innovative and comprehensive approach to leading transformation in the workplace.
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“WE DO NOT SEE THINGS AS THEY ARE, WE SEE THEM AS WE ARE”

Anais Nin (1961)

Introduction

Organizations in every sector of the workforce are continually faced with mounting pressure to change. Changes in the economy, information technology, the environment, and the challenges wrought by globalization demand that individuals and organizations as a whole learn how to change in order to remain competitive and to grow in an increasingly diverse world (Poell, Yorks & Marsick, 2009). In an effort to combat the pressure that is now embedded within the governance structures of the new business climate, organizations spend billions of dollars in change management consultation and persistently promote strategic learning initiatives to increase employee performance and organizational productivity (Franz, 2010). An organization’s ability to learn is the critical element for successful change (Franz, 2010; Weick & Quinn, 1999). For many people, however, learning to change is an anxiety provoking process that gives rise to a number of debilitating emotions including stress, apprehension and fear. (Curtis & White, 2002; Barnett, 1999). Change in the workplace is often perceived as an attack on the status quo (Bruckman, 2008), and therefore challenges the individual members’ basic assumptions about how the organization ought to be. Accordingly, organizational change is a highly complex psychosocial process (Bandura, 1997; Goleman, Boyatzis, & Mckee, 2002). In order for organizations to change, they must learn. Successful organizational change strategies require an essential transformative learning environment facilitated through emotional leadership.
Managing organizational change is a failing business; over the past two decades, only about thirty percent of change initiatives have yielded positive returns on the investment of considerable time and money (Bruckman, 2008; Warrick 2009). In most cases, change programs result in serious deterioration of employee trust, lowered productivity, wounded organizational culture and significant financial loss (Kotter, 1996; Curtis & White, 2002). Why, then, do the majority of organizational change initiatives fail? What is missing from the traditional organizational change process that impedes productive change? How can organizations learn more effectively to increase the success of their change processes? What are the critical elements of leadership necessary for change? How can employee resistance be mediated to support change processes? What are the emotional implications of change in the workplace? Answering these questions will lead to a more holistic and pragmatic perspective towards understanding the organizational change process.

Organizational change processes that create improved employee performance, elevated employee morale, continuous learning and increase profits are indeed possible (Schein, 2004). Leading organizational change depends on learning and the type of learning necessary for change to successfully occur must be transformative (Franz, 2010). One requires particular emotional strength to navigate the transformation process (Mezirow, 1991); therefore, leaders must also demonstrate a basic level of emotional intelligence to lead the learning process for organizational change (Goleman, 1998). Burns (1978) articulates the importance of emotionally secure leadership for creating and sustaining change suggesting that, “people need appreciation, recognition, and a feeling of accomplishment, and the confidence that people who are important to them believe in
them. But meeting such psychological needs, as opposed to satisfying merely material ones such as more pay, calls for the sophisticated use of human skills” (p. 374). Real and sustainable change occurs when new skills, knowledge and processes in the workplace generate ongoing changes in motivation, goals and continuous learning (Burns, 1978). The purpose of this paper is to examine the basic genealogy of organizational change through a comprehensive and critical lens. Organizational change will be shown to encompass a broad and multidisciplinary set of structural processes that must be implemented using an innovative and variable approach. This paper will be presented in four parts, beginning with a broad examination of the current models and common errors that occur in the field of organizational change. The three key components for successful organizational change that will be identified in parts two, three and four are transformative learning, transformative leadership and employee psychological safety established through the development of personal and organizational self-efficacy. Finally, the Atomic Model of Organizational Change will be introduced as a functional framework for facilitating the dynamic processes of organizational change.

**Atomic Model of Organizational Change**

The atomic model of organizational change suggests a need for an orbiting and innovative approach to facilitating organizational change in which agents continually assess and implement simultaneous processes of transformative learning, transformative leadership and the psychological safety of self-efficacy throughout the various stages of change. Understanding organizational change as the nucleus of the atomic model, removing or neglecting any of the orbiting components is likely to obstruct the change process. Traditional models of organizational change as identified by Lewin (1947),
Kotter (1996), and Schein (2004) are valuable for understanding the general stages that strategic change initiatives may navigate, however, each organization must be managed according to its own unique culture and behavioural characteristics (Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008). The atomic model of organizational change identified here, promotes a dynamic and fluid implementation of change that is predicated on a strong foundation of meaningful learning and facilitated through intentional and emotionally safe leadership.

An organization can be understood as a group of people deliberately constructed and reconstructed in an effort to attain particular goals (Christopher & Paul, 2010). Organizations are generally made up of individual members that are organized together as teams, departments, branches and sections under the governing authority of administrative actors (Weber, 1947). The atomic model of organizational change emphasizes the importance of respecting each specific person and each organizational unit with unique leadership and detailed attention throughout the change process. In order for organizations to change, they must learn (Franz, 2010; Schein, 2004). Successful organizational change strategies must engage in transformative learning facilitated through emotionally secure and transformational leadership. All of the components are equally important and will be described in detail below.

*Atomic Model of Organizational Change

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**Organizational Change**

**Psychological Safety; Self-Efficacy**

**Transformative Leadership**

**Transformative Learning**
Organizational Change is a shift or adaptation of behaviours, values, strategies and techniques that are intentionally implemented in the workplace with the aim of enhancing individual growth and organizational performance (Weick & Quinn, 1999). As the technological capacity of the world triples each year and as the rate of knowledge production reaches its highest levels in human history, the common understanding of what can be defined as a career is metamorphosing into a new and vastly more complex concept (Schein, 2010). The speed of change is moving at an unprecedented pace as Stuht and Colcord (2011) note that the top ten most in-demand jobs for the year 2010 did not even exist in 2004 and new media such as shared workspaces, social networks and wikis are emerging as more powerful and more efficient tools for communication and learning (Ketter, 2010). According to Barnett (1999), the nature and meaning of fundamental perceptions such as self, identity, work and knowing are no longer clearly understood in a world of change. Under these conditions of supercomplexity (Barnett, 1999), change is not only necessary; it is inevitable (Curtis & White, 2002).

Organizations that fail to recognize the need to change are at risk of losing their competitive advantage and becoming vulnerable to potential collapse (Kellerman, 1999; Boga & Ensari, 2009). Managing change within organizations, however, is not a simple process and requires considerable time and effective leadership in order to be successful (Carter 2008; Erwin, 2009). In general, people within organizations are not interested in pursuing change unless there is a compelling reason to do so (Bouckenooghe, Devos & Van Den Broeck, 2009). Organizational change is often met with an abundance of employee resistance causing the vast majority of change initiatives to fail (Bruckman,
But change in and of itself is not what employees are resisting. As Bruckman (2008) suggests, few people would resist an increase in pay or resist an opportunity to work for a project they believe is valuable and exciting, nor would employees resist more time and resources to do their job well. Resistance to organizational change erupts from the fearful perception of increased job demands, personal insecurity about the ability to perform, lack of personal control, loss of power or influence, organizational ambiguity, and anxiety about the real or imagined consequences of the intended change (Bruckman, 2008; Boga & Ensari, 2009; Curtis & White, 2002; Tvedt, Saksvik & Nytro, 2009). To a great extent, individuals define themselves by the type of work that they do (Casey, 1999). On a daily basis, people create a sense of personal meaning and develop their sense of identity through their role in the workplace (Timma, 2007; Algrhen & Tett, 2010). When an individuals’ perception about their role and responsibility at work changes or their sense of belongingness within the work group is challenged, resistance to change will emerge (Lewin, 1945).

Resistance to organizational change can be understood as any employee behaviour that impedes, prevents, or damages the implementation of intentional workplace change (Curtis & White, 2002). Employees most commonly assume a self-protective and defensive posture in reaction to the unpredictable circumstances that are inherently present in the process of intended workplace change (Tvedt, Saksvik, & Nytro, 2009). Lewin (1947) suggests that change requires the framework of an individuals’ total social life and that the greater the social value an individual places on a working group, the greater that individual will resist the shift away from the normative standard. According to Bruckman (2008), “asking people to make significant behavioral changes is
the most frightening request one can make of them” (p. 215). Undervaluing the importance or the legitimacy of employee fear and failing to support the emotional resistance of change is a major error found within the structure of many change initiatives (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). Organizational change is more than a simple financial strategy; it is a deeply personal and emotional process for all of the people involved.

Agents of organizational change must be skilled in recognizing the signs and symptoms of resistance in order to facilitate successful change (Warrick, 2009). More importantly, agents should also be knowledgeable in the fact that resistance is a natural part of the change process. Curtis and White (2002) suggest that change occurring in the absence of resistance is not change at all; rather it is merely an illusion of actual change. The fear of change permeates all levels of the organization and indeed a great deal of resistance to change can be found among the management ranks. Long-standing managers and executives often make attempts to undermine the change program by either not adapting their own behaviour or by allowing employees to continue to behave in ways that also threaten the integrity of the change initiative (Erwin, 2009). Managers and executives feel like they have the most to lose and often struggle with their perceived ability to perform the new organizational processes (Burns, 1978). Facilitating organizational change requires a delicate appreciation for the interpersonal relationships between peers and superiors, leading to a greater sense of readiness and a stronger sense of personal and organizational preparedness for change (Boucknooghe, Devos & Van Den Broeck, 2009). Underestimating the value of the emotional and psychosocial support needed for change is a significant error that many organizations make.
Errors of Organizational Change

As one of the leading scholars in the field of organizational change, Kotter (1996) acknowledges that “[t]o some degree, the downside of change is inevitable. Whenever human communities are forced to adjust to shifting conditions, pain is ever present. But a significant amount of the waste and anguish we’ve witnessed in the past decade is avoidable” (p. 4). All too often, an organization’s attempt to make positive change delivers disappointing results and returns unintended consequences of wasted resources and employee frustration (Warrick, 2009; Weick & Quinn, 1999).

Organizational change is a highly complicated process that eludes many well-intentioned leaders. Boga and Ensari (2009) highlight three interconnected phases that may mitigate the negative potential associated with change. First, organizational leadership should thoroughly conceptualize the intended change strategy; then motivate employees with proper levels of passion and optimism; and third, the process should conclude with organizational leaders providing all of the necessary resources needed complete the task. Leading change, however, is much more complicated than these steps would suggest; the atomic model of organizational change recognizes the complexity of workplace change and identifies a holistic perspective that addresses the entire social and emotional field of personal and professional transformation. Traditional models of organizational change tend to be too narrow and undervalue the necessary social and emotional connotations of significant change in the workplace. Kotter (1996) further explores the complexity of change and has identified eight of the most common errors that organizations make during the change process.

Error #1: Allowing Too Much Complacency
The first, and perhaps the most significant error that organizations make when attempting to facilitate change is allowing too much complacency across the organization (Kotter, 1996). Organizations that fail to generate a strong enough sense of urgency and fail to maintain the necessary pressure to change through communication and ensuring that employees understand that the intended change is not merely a passing fad often generates fatal levels of organizational complacency (Erwin, 2009). An accumulation of organizational success may also breed a culture of complacency as employees begin to feel satisfied with the results that have accomplished in the past (Kotter, 1996). Success can dilute the sense of urgency that necessarily empowers change and decreases employee motivation to continuously innovate, create and learn (Boga & Ensari, 2009). Without a palpable and persuasive sense of urgency, employees will not provide their organizations with the extra effort that is necessary for continued success (Kotter, 1996). For many organizations, complacency provides employees with an abundance of evidence to suggest that change is unnecessary; therefore, managing the social and emotional components of complacency is a vital aspect of initiating change (Carter, 2008).

**Error #2: Failing to Create a Sufficiently Powerful Guiding Coalition**

Individuals rarely have the capability to lead successful organizational change on their own (Erwin, 2009). Warrick (2009) suggests that organizations should develop internal change champions that can help develop a strong coalition. People tend to be more comfortable working in groups and a strong coalition helps to build an attractive quality to the change program for others in the group (Lewin, 1947). Organizations that attempt to create change without the support of a powerful coalition of cooperative
members from all levels of the organization including the CEO down to middle managers and front line workers will eventually be overcome by internal forces of self-interest that will ultimately undermine the change initiative (Kotter, 1996).

**Error #3: Underestimating the Power of Vision**

Skilled leaders are capable of providing a clear vision by offering a solid understanding of the purpose and benefits of change in simplified and clear direction (Warrick, 2009). Erwin (2009), however, has suggested that a lack of understanding about basic leadership and management principles has significantly impaired a great deal of change programs. A clear vision helps to align, support and inspire the directive purpose of change. Organizations that lack a clear vision for the change process will succumb to trivial internal debates, employee confusion and organizational unrest (Kotter, 1996). Kotter (1996) cautions against overly complicated visions, suggesting that leaders should be able to describe the organization’s vision for change in less than five minutes.

**Error #4: Undercommunicating the Vision by a Factor of 10 (or 100 or Even 1000)**

Failure to adequately communicate the intentions of the organizational change initiative across the organization is one of the main reasons change programs fail (Warrick, 2009). Credible communication is the catalyst towards capturing the members’ basic personal desires and motivations in regards to the intended change. Kotter (1996) outlines three patterns of ineffective communication that stall transformation in the workplace. First, organizations may develop a strong vision, but only hold a limited number of meetings and discussions in the beginning stages of the process and the message is subsequently lost. Second, the most senior executive of the company spends
considerable effort delivering speeches to employees, but most of the supporting managers are left out of the communication process. Finally, a great deal of effort is organized in newsletters and presentations but important members of the organization behave in ways that contradict the communicated message. Leaders must demonstrate the vision through their actions for successful change (Weick & Quinn, 1999).

**Error #5: Permitting Obstacles to Block the New Vision**

As employees buy into the goals and support the direction of the change initiative, they often become disempowered by obstacles that impede the overall progress of change (Kotter, 1996). Readiness for change depends a great deal on individual and organizational beliefs, feelings and desired objectives in response to the employees’ perceived ability to successfully perform the changes (Bouckenooghe, Devos, & Van den Broeck, 2009). Obstacles may include the organizational structure, limited job functions, poor performance appraisals or employee demands that are inconsistent with the planned change. Learning organizations and strong leadership actively seek and remove obstacles to change through ongoing dialogue, corporate reflection and continuous innovation (Bratton et al., 2004; Garvin, Edmondson, & Gino, 2008).

**Error #6: Failing to Create Short-Term Wins**

The reality about true organizational transformation is that it takes time to fully develop (Erwin, 2009). Employees tend to give up too early and increase their level of resistance in the absence of experiencing short-term wins (Kotter, 1996). According to Bruckman (2008), “managers spend much more energy catching employees doing something wrong than recognizing what employees do right” (p. 216). Concerted efforts to create short-term wins and offer sustained emotional support can keep complacency
down and empower employees to continue to exert effort throughout the entire change process. Most employees will want to experience short-term wins within six to 18 months of the change program (Kotter, 1996).

**Error #7: Declaring Victory Too Soon**

While it is important for organizations to celebrate short-term wins, it is vitally important that they do not declare the change initiative to be complete too soon. In order for true and deep organizational change to occur, it may require three to 10 years for the entire organization to complete the process (Kotter, 1996). A challenge for change agents is to maintain the organizational commitment of energy and patience to complete the entire process and not become complacent with too many short-term wins. As the process of change becomes more drawn out, employees may begin to feel increased levels of anxiety that leaders must support rather than simply declaring the project complete (Tvedt, Sksvik, & Nytro, 2009).

**Error #8: Neglecting to Anchor Changes Firmly in the Corporate Culture**

Organizational change only becomes sustainable when the new ways of thinking and acting are solidified as normative behavioural practices within the corporate culture (Erwin, 2009). When the urgency to change has been removed, the newly established behaviours are subject to deterioration if they are not completely absorbed as part of the social fabric and the shared values within the organizational discourse. Groups generally become cohesive when the membership is producing positive attitudes and displaying desirable behaviours in an effort to further develop and collectively maintain the positive conditions of the group (Friedkin, 2004). The development of organizational culture is a powerful and important tool for creating sustainable change. Strong anchoring of the
culture will ensure that the intended changes will move to also become an important part of the future generations within organization (Schein, 2004; Kotter, 1996).

The errors of organizational change outlined by Kotter (1996) allude to a need for a more comprehensive and a more conscious approach for leading significant transformation in the workplace. In order for change to be successful, employees must be empowered to learn and emotionally supported through compelling leadership during the entire process of change. Compelling leadership can inspire dialogue, create trust, and secure a foundation of change. Successful change initiatives must engage in transformative learning that is facilitated by strong and deliberate emotional leadership. Failure to recognize the affective dimension of workplace change undermines the complexity of the task and produces negative results. Each organization will experience transformation in a unique way and must be directed through the stages of change accordingly.

**Creating and Sustaining Change**

Kurt Lewin (1948) developed one of the earliest and most influential theories of organizational change (Schein, 2004; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Lewin (1947) offers a three-stage approach to change described as the *unfreezing, moving, and refreezing* model. For Lewin (1945) change “is a process in which changes of knowledge and beliefs, changes of values and standards, changes of emotional attachments and needs, and changes of everyday conduct occur not piecemeal and independently of each other, but within the framework of the individual’s total life in the group” (p. 49). The process of change, according to Lewin (1945), affects a person in three particular ways:

1. The cognitive structure (individual perceptions and personal meaning)
2. Valences and values (social status, social norms, and group dynamics)

3. Motoric action (degree of personal control over physical and social movement)

Lewin (1945) posits that an individual’s sense of belongingness to a group is a key component towards creating and accepting a new belief structure and value system in the workplace. The emotional connections and the relational experiences of workplace bonds facilitate the central sense of group belongingness that promotes innovative learning and change (Fenwick, 2008). Lewin (1945) further suggests that the change process is not a simple linear progression from beginning to end. Acquiring the correct knowledge of the intended change and even first hand experience and physical action may not be sufficient for leading complete transformation. Lewin (1999) argues, “it is one thing to be motivated, another to transform motivation into concrete goals and into stabilizing these goals in a way which would carry the individual through the actual completion of the work” (p. 288). The complete constellation of the entire social and emotional field of the individual within the context of the organization must be considered, organized and reorganized through meaningful learning and leadership in order for change to be successful.

**Unfreezing**

Embedded social habits and social equilibrium are often conceived as major obstacles towards implementing change (Lewin, 1947). Schein (2004) explains that social habits and cognitive structures serve as tools for people to organize and understand the mass of environmental stimuli, which helps individuals to create a comfortable and predictable sense of personal meaning. In order to overcome the deep and personal resistance that often accompanies the need to change, a sufficient force is required to
break the individuals’ current frame of reference. Lewin (1947) describes this force as the *unfreezing* of social habits. The unfreezing stage of organizational change involves developing and creating various sources of motivation and preparation for change. The unfreezing stage begins with an experience of disequilibrium that causes individuals to develop coping mechanisms that move beyond that which is already reinforced by individual assumptions (Lewin, 1947). Schein (2004) elaborated on Lewin’s theory of organizational change by adding three important processes that must be considered during the unfreezing stage:

1. Employees require sufficient *disconfirming data* to generate enough personal discomfort and disequilibrium to be persuaded to change.
2. The disconfirming data must be connected to the broader standards and the goals that will create sufficient anxiety or guilt to motivate action.
3. Employees require sufficient psychological safety that reinforces the possibility of completing the change and supports learning new frames of reference without losing their identity or integrity.

The challenge involved in the unfreezing stage is that individuals must first unlearn particular assumptions about themselves and their role within the organization and subsequently or simultaneously learn or create a new or competing frame of reference. As Schein (2004) has suggested, the process of change requires significant social and emotional support from peers and leaders at work.

**Moving**

The second stage of organizational change presented by Lewin (1947) involves actually using the new or revised knowledge and skills that the organization is moving
towards. The moving forces require individuals to restructure their perspectives and adapt their behaviour to the new or suggested norms. It is during the second stage that the change begins to take shape. It is important for change agents to be critically aware that the moving stage is the most difficult for people to navigate (Erwin, 2009). As Lewin (1945) suggests, change is a social process and as the new knowledge or skill is being implemented, employees may struggle with social tensions between the old and new forms. “If the individual should try to diverge ‘too much’ from group standards, he would find himself in increasing difficulties” (Lewin, 1999, p. 281). The cognitive restructuring involved in the moving stage requires individuals to assess their willingness to please their immediate peers versus their desire to please the directives of the organization. The social and emotional significance of each individual member as a part of a working group acquires significant value and further requires the direct support from the group’s leadership (Lewin, 1945).

**Refreezing**

The final stage of the change process for Lewin (1947) involves confirming and reinforcing the new data, skills or processes. An important part of the refreezing procedure is to create a strong presence of leadership that confirms the new knowledge and supports the direction of the new organizational behaviours. As more examples of confirming data become available from important sources such as internal supports, external stakeholders and the broader environment, the new values and beliefs of the organization will begin to stabilize (Schein, 2004). Organizational processes of change are solidified and become normative standards “whenever a strong we-feeling is created” (Lewin, 1945, p. 55); and when the planned change becomes defined as part of the basic
assumptions of personal ownership within the organizational membership. The refreeze stage attempts to form the new values, beliefs and behaviours as the dominant discursive perception to the degree that the intended forces of change become internalized and taken for granted by the organization as a whole (Lewin, 1945; Schein, 2004). The intended change can only be considered complete when it becomes fully ingrained, or frozen as part of the organizational culture.

Schein (2004) defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions that was learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems” (p. 17). Developing organizational culture and creating sustainable change depends on the organizations ability to learn and the type of learning necessary for significant change in the workplace is transformative (Franz, 2005). The process of organizational change gives rise to a survival anxiety and a defensive posture among the members of the organization (Bruckman, 2009; Schein, 2004). However, as soon as the employee accepts that there is a requisite need for change, they will also develop a concomitant learning anxiety. “It is the interaction of these two anxieties that creates the complex dynamics of change” (Schein, 2004, p. 329).

**PART TWO: Learning Theories**

An organization’s ability to learn is the most powerful force that guides and directs the organization’s endurance and prosperity in the globalized marketplace (Torlak, 2004; Schein, 1993). Learning and knowledge can be considered as the most important resource and may have become the only sustainable competitive advantage
between organizations (Karp, 2004; Boud & Garrick, 1999). A learning organization is skilled at creating, acquiring, interpreting, and transferring knowledge and moving that knowledge into continuous action and adaptation throughout the entire organization (Garvin, Edmonson & Gino, 2008). Just as organizational change is a complex psychosocial process; learning at work equally involves complex social processes that inform the dynamics of human relationships, organizational discourse, culture, and environmental exchanges within various working groups (Sebrant, 2008; Fenwick, 2008).

In order for organizations to successfully learn and subsequently change, the rate of learning must be greater or equal to the rate of change (Edmonstone & MacKenzie, 2005). Unfortunately, the rate of change is accelerating beyond the innovative capacity of many organizations (Bruckman, 2009). For successful change to occur, organizations must engage in transformative learning facilitated through emotional leadership.

**Learning at Work**

The ultimate goal of learning at work is to develop the personal potential for flexible and creative action within the context of organized work (Fenwick, 2008). Learning at work aims to develop the urgent employee competencies that will benefit the organization immediately, as well as the long-term competencies that will be necessary to carry the organization into the future (Boud & Garrick, 1999). Boud and Garrick (1999) provide a general overview of workplace learning suggesting three strategic purposes for learning at work:

1. Improving performance for the benefit of the organization
2. Improving learning for the benefit of the learner
3. Improving learning as a social investment
As a reflection for the needs and the purposes of learning at work, many organizations have changed their overall structure from traditionally bureaucratic and hierarchical forms to more flexible and participative systems of organizing in the workplace (Casey, 1999). Sebrant (2008) suggests that learning at work is interactive and ingrained as a natural process of organizing, especially during processes of change and leading learning organizations.

The concepts of organizational learning and learning organizations are two distinct and separate ideas (Torlak, 2004; Bratton et al., 2004). Organizational learning refers to specific and quantifiable learning strategies that organizations employ to achieve a concrete purpose (Bratton et al., 2004). Organizational learning involves the processes of how organizations learn and generally includes all activities that produce successful outcomes. Organizational learning provides strategies for understanding and managing the organization and the organization’s surrounding environment in an empirical way (Torlak, 2004). In this way, organizational learning relates to the dynamic of instrumental learning identified by Mezirow (1991) in transformation theory. The instrumental learning domain is based on cause and effect relationships and is observable through task oriented problem solving (Mezirow, 1991). Planned change initiatives, skill development, leadership training, and formal learning programs all lead to a practical framework of instrumental and organizational learning. Organizations that encourage and support a variety of organizational learning strategies are better equipped and more prepared to become learning organizations.

The concept of the learning organization refers to the intangible characteristics of the learning that occurs within an organization (Bratton et al., 2004). A learning
organization can be understood as a type of organization that thinks holistically, tolerates mistakes, promotes open dialogue, and fosters continuous adaptation (Garvin, Edmondson & Gino, 2008). Mezirow (1991) describes this type of learning as communicative learning. Communicative learning attempts to understand the values, beliefs, ideals, and purposes of the behaviour and communication of others (Mezirow, 1991; Franz, 2010). Learning organizations expand the human capacity of their members and provide an environment where people feel comfortable learning together (Bratton et al., 2004). Within the discursive structure of learning organizations, learning is conceived as a natural and necessary part of everyday work (Solomon, 1999). Learning organizations create continuous learning opportunities, promote enquiry, encourage collaboration and empower employees to take risks and engage in deeper learning (Matthews & Candy, 1999). For Bratton et al. (2004) “people empowered and continuously learning, are central to organizational economic performance” (p. 39).

Garvin, Edmondson and Gino (2008) suggest that the building blocks of a genuine learning organization include a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and leadership behaviour that supports and encourages learning. But as Bratton et al. (2004) explain, there are a number of competing social and political forces that threaten the integrity of learning in the workplace. Learning for the adult workforce is necessary for productivity and change; yet facilitating adult learning is not an easy task. According to Barnett (1999), being in a state of learning is associated with immaturity and undermines one’s actual or perceived social status and authority in the workplace. Learning as an adult, therefore, is a complex social process that tends to be an emotionally charged and frightening experience (Barnett, 1999; Fenwick, 2008;
Schein, 2004). Schein (2004) suggests that adult learning anxiety is the product of several specific fears in relation to learning at work. According to Schein (2004) the fear of temporary incompetence, fear of punishment for incompetence, fear of loss of personal identity and fear of the loss of group membership provides the emotional base for learning anxiety. An accumulation of learning anxiety suspends employee motivation to accept transformation and produces resistance against the validity of the disconfirming data that advocates the organizational need for change (Schein, 2004). For successful change to occur, organizations must mediate anxiety and promote learning. Transformative learning facilitated through emotionally secure leadership is capable of producing the environment and providing the necessary guidance to achieve the goals of planned change.

**Transformative Learning**

Transformative learning is the first key component of the atomic model for successful organizational change. According to Mezirow (1991), learning “may be understood as the process of using a prior interpretation to construe a new or a revised interpretation of the meaning of one’s experience in order to guide future action” (p. 12). Understood in this way, learning is bound by experience and informs the broader context of social interaction. Mezirow (1991) suggests the most distinctive human quality is the innate need to make sense of one’s experience and create a personal interpretation of meaning. The human need to make meaning provides coherence to the human experience and validates knowledge (Mezirow, 1991). The transformative process of learning requires individuals to critically assess how they think and to further understand why they think in the way that they do. For Mezirow (2000), transformative learning
“refers to the process by which we transform our taken-for-granted frames of reference (meaning perspectives, habits of mind, mind-sets) to make them more inclusive, discriminating, open, emotionally capable of change, and reflective so that they may generate beliefs, and opinions that will prove more true or justified to guide action” (pp. 63-64).

Transformative learning is the process of becoming aware of the tacit assumptions, taken-for-granted beliefs and cultural assimilations that pervade adult life (Wiessner & Mezirow, 2000). Becoming aware of the tacit assumptions that create personal meaning allows the learner to isolate particular distortions and misrepresentations that inform the baseline of specific uncritically examined knowledge (Mezirow, 1991). The power of transformative learning for the purpose of organizational change motivates individuals to engage in critical reflection of their own knowledge and experience and actively guides the learner to create a revision or adaptation of their current frame of reference (Mezirow, 2000). Transformative learning, therefore, creates a sense of coherence and provides meaning to personal experience that is more authentic and more dependable than the previous interpretation (Mezirow 1991; Mezirow, 2000). “Transformation Theory’s focus is on how we learn to negotiate and act on our own purposes, values, feelings, and meanings rather than those we have uncritically assimilated from others-to gain greater control over our lives as socially responsible, clear thinking decision makers” (Mezirow, 2000, p. 64). The transformative learning process is vital for successful organizational change (Franz, 2005). However, Schein (1993) explains, “we know that we must learn how to learn, but we are afraid to admit it” (p. 85). Transformative learning offers the necessary critical reflection that adults may
require to navigate the anxiety that accompanies the disorienting situations of change and learning in the context of the workplace.

For Mezirow (1991) learning always occurs in five important and interacting contexts:

1. The frame of reference or meaning perspective in which the learning is embedded
2. The conditions of communication: language mastery; the codes that delimit categories, constructs and labels; and the ways in which problematic assertions are validated
3. The line of action in which learning occurs
4. The self-image of the learner
5. The situation encountered, that is, the external circumstances within which an interpretation is made and remembered

The contexts for learning identified by Mezirow (1991) provide an important framework for understanding the process of transformation and for leading organizational change. According to Weber (1947), the social process of interpreting meaning, including during the process of learning and change, is bound together by various components that are both immediately understandable and non-understandable. Transformative learning attempts to create a new or revised meaning scheme or meaning perspective that enables learners to understand the nature of change and how to proceed through action. According to Mezirow (1991), “[w]e produce facts rather than discover them; the ‘facts’ that an adult learns thus are grounded in the orientation and frame of reference of the learner” (p. 25). Transformative learning comparatively assesses previously acquired knowledge and experience in contrast to new or disorienting
circumstances that challenge the contents of personal meaning perspectives or meaning schemes (Mezirow, 2000). Facilitating transformative learning “is not to tell the learner what to do but only to present different sets of rules, tactics, and criteria for judging” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 203). Knowles (1984) describes the fundamental nature of the adult learner as autonomous and self-directed, therefore, employees experiencing change in the workplace ought to be given the opportunity to reflect upon and construe their thoughts and emotions as they re-define themselves in light of the new circumstances. Mezirow (1991) clearly explains that transformative learning alone is not enough to inspire effective social action such as organizational change. According to Burns (1978), the most compelling driving force for effective leadership and for change is purpose. For Burns (1978), the essence of leading transformation is to “make conscious what lies unconscious among followers” (p. 40). The process of creating purpose and re-defining meaning perspectives and meaning schemes through transformative learning provides an important conceptual and practical backdrop for the atomic model of organizational change. Providing employees with purpose and consciously facilitating the domains of perspective transformation for organizational change requires a safe learning environment and the support of emotionally secure leadership (Franz, 2010).

**Meaning Perspective**

“A meaning perspective is a habitual set of expectations that constitutes an orienting frame of reference that we use in projecting our symbolic models and evaluating the meaning of experience” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 42). Meaning perspectives provide the framework for how and why individuals create meaning and give significance to the nature of one’s experience. Meaning perspectives establish the learner’s self-
image, motivate their desires, inform individual choice and influence the overall direction of personal decisions (Mezirow, 1991). In other words, meaning perspectives define the core contents of individual’s complete sense of self. Mezirow (1991) suggests that individual interpretations are made up of three different types of meaning perspective including the epistemic, sociolinguistic and psychological domains.

An epistemic meaning perspective refers to the way individuals’ construct knowledge and how they move that knowledge into action. The epistemic perspective refers to cognitive structures, developmental capacities and individual thought processes (Mezirow, 1991). The sociolinguistic perspective refers to the normative assimilations that individual learners arbitrarily form through interactions with other members of their community, culture and environment (Mezirow, 1991). The sociolinguistic perspective defines how an individual will take action according to their interpretation of the world (Mezirow, 1991). The psychological perspective formulates one’s self-concept; it governs one’s locus of control, individual defense mechanisms, personal characteristics and adds value to one’s needs and wants (Mezirow, 1991). The social and institutional forces that guide and influence the creation of meaning perspectives provide important insight into the nature of learning and change for organizations (Sebrant, 2008). Leaders that become aware of the deeply imbedded and personal meaning constructs of the individuals at work will be more prepared and better equipped to facilitate the emotional complexity that pervaded learning and change in the workplace.

**Meaning Scheme**

“A meaning scheme is the particular knowledge, beliefs, value judgments, and feelings that become articulated in an interpretation” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 44). Clusters of
meaning schemes supply the fundamental contents of meaning perspectives (Mezirow, 1991). Meaning schemes are created through a collection of tacit assumptions that guide specific action according to specialized opinions, preferences and bias (Mezirow, 2000). Meaning schemes are subject to critical reflection and transformation in a more accessible way than meaning perspectives, however, continual alteration of meaning schemes may lead to perspective transformation over time (Mezirow, 1991; Mezirow, 2000). When meaning schemes are transformed and therefore, no longer providing full value to meaning perspectives, the adult learner may develop anxiety and experience elements of meaninglessness (Mezirow, 1991). According to Weber (1947), all interpretations of meaning strive for clarity and comprehension and as a result, meaninglessness appears when objects, processes or conditions cannot be related to an objective purpose. Agents of organizational change must align the transformative learning needs of employees to the objective purpose of the intended outcome. Work-based meaning schemes and meaning perspectives that create as sense meaninglessness will inhibit the progress of organizational change. Successful change depends on meaningful transformative learning and requires the detailed attention of emotional leadership offered through the atomic model of organizational change.

Significant and planned change in the workplace that challenges one’s personal equilibrium as a teacher, nurse or manufacturer can activate the transformation process. According to Mezirow (1991) “[a]ny major challenge to an established perspective can result in a transformation. These challenges are painful; they often call into question deeply held personal values and threatens our very sense of self” (p. 168). Mezirow (2000) identified ten phases through which perspective transformative may occur:
1. A disorienting dilemma

2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt or shame

3. A critical assessment of assumptions

4. Recognition that one’s discontent and that the process of transformation are shared

5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions

6. Planning a course of action

7. Acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one’s plans

8. Provisional trying of new roles

9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

10. A reintegration into one’s life on the basis of conditions dictated by one’s new perspective.

 Perspective transformation, and to the same degree, the process of organizational change can be an emotionally demanding experience (Mezirow, 2000; Schein, 2004). As Mezirow (1991) explains that “[i]t is not enough to understand intellectually the need to change the way one acts; one requires emotional strength and an act of will in order to move forward” (p. 171). In other words, the learner must have sufficient motivation to change, a phenomenon which Weber (1947) describes as observable evidence to continue towards the “conduct in question” (p 98-99). Mezirow (1991) further explains that progress in the transformation process can be impaired when the learner acquires “an insight that results in a transformation in meaning scheme that may contribute over time toward a change in meaning perspective but at the moment comes into conflict with the established meaning perspective and is overwhelmed by it” (p. 171). Transformative
learning cannot be evoked at will and demands adequate space and time for critical reflection and validity testing to occur (Mezirow, 1991). In the context of organizational change, the transformative learning process requires focused facilitation and depends on strong leadership to create the environment that will produce sufficient psychological safety to navigate the entire field of change (Franz, 2005; Kotter, 1996).

### Part Three: Leadership

Leadership is the second key component for facilitating the atomic model of organizational change. Leadership is one of the most important factors for successful learning and change management (Boga & Ensari, 2009); yet for many organizations, the concept of what leadership actually entails suffers from a critical lack of understanding in theory and as a body of practice (Warrick, 2009; Eriwn, 2009). As one of the first theorists to provide a scholarly perspective on leadership, Burns (1978) defines leadership as “leaders inducing followers to act for certain goals that represent the values, and the motivations – the wants and needs, the aspirations and expectations of both leaders and followers” (p. 19). Burns’ (1978) definition is unique in the sense that it includes the follower as an important component of effective leadership. Avolio (2007) argues that many leadership studies focus too narrowly on the leader as the focal point of change, which tends to obscure the practical application of leadership in the context of actual work. For Kellerman (1999), the goals of leadership ought to represent significant change and may come from anywhere within the hierarchical structure of an organization. Understood in this way, leadership is a malleable phenomenon that permeates every aspect of learning and change in the workplace.

According to Johnson (2008) “transformative learning increases a leader’s
effectiveness by developing new mental models that are more capable of handling new and complex phenomena” (p. 86). But leadership is most often confused and misinterpreted by what can be defined as management. Kotter (1996) explains management as “a set of processes that keep a complicated system of people and technology running smoothly” (p. 25). Management is an authoritative directive that produces elements of predictability including aspects of budgeting, organizing, planning, problem solving, and does not involve significant change (Kotter, 1996; Kellerman, 1999). Sebrant (2008) relates management to the concept of power, suggesting that power can be a moving force that enables knowledge in the workplace. Power has the potential to arbitrarily produce the acceptable standards and control the performance of knowledge at work (Sebrant, 2008). Weber defines power as “the probability that one actor within a social relationship will be in a position to carry out his own will despite resistance, regardless of the basis on which this probability rests (p. 152). Management is indeed an important aspect of organizational development, but only leadership can facilitate the dynamics of change (Kotter, 1996). Leadership is much more than the wielding of power. Leadership is an aspect of power (Burns, 1978), however it is a unique and distinct process that is necessary for deep learning and change in the workplace. Leadership aims to synchronize motives and inspire the goals of leaders as well as followers in a mutual and reciprocal relationship (Burns, 1978). “All leaders are actual or potential power holders, but not all power holders are leaders” (p. Burns, 1978, p. 18).

According to Kotter (1996) facilitating successful organizational change is 70 to 90 percent leadership and only 10 to 30 percent management. Organizational change cannot
occur without learning yet learning at work necessarily depends on leadership (Schien, 2004; Johnson, 2008). In order to facilitate effective transformative learning and organizational change, leaders must provide open and honest feedback in real time and challenge followers to critically reflect on their role and their personal identity in the workplace to interpret a new or revised sense of meaning that aligns with the goals of planned change (Johnson, 2008). Leadership that inspires transformation in the workplace can positively persuade followers to exceed the limits of their own self-interest and move people to give more than they originally expected for the benefit of the organization (Bass, 1997). However, during periods of organizational change, employees tend to avoid the potential harm or discomfort associated with transformation, therefore, leaders must be sensitive to the emotional needs of the followers they intend to change (Boga & Ensari, 2009). Burns (1978) identifies this form of emotionally supportive leadership as transformational leadership in contrast to the concept of transactional leadership. In order for organizations to successfully change, they must engage in transformative learning that is guided and directed through strong and stable emotional leadership.

**Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership engages the full person of the follower “in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality (Burns, 1978, p. 20). Transformational leadership is characterized by four elements of charisma, intellectual stimulation, individualized consideration, and inspirational motivation (Bass, 1997); and is emotionally compelling with specific aims to develop intentional relationships between leaders and followers. Transformational leaders are the
key component towards maintaining the emotional stability of the working relationships and are the major force that accomplishes the combined purposes of leaders and followers within organizations (Burns, 1978). During times of change, transformational leadership clearly communicates the vision of organizations and creates enthusiasm, loyalty and trust (Boga & Ensari, 2009). Deep learning and change is most effectively facilitated through the emotional support of transformational leadership, thereby, increasing the success of organizational change programs (Bass, 1997). Leaders must be willing to raise the level of discontent in the organization and make people feel uncomfortable while being capable of providing the necessary emotional support to navigate the transition (Burns, 1978; Bass, Avolio, 2007). Transformational leaders assess everyday situations as unique and provide leadership that stimulates, enables, promotes and models the desirable behaviours of the organization (Avolio, 2007; Nielson & Munir, 2009). As an innovative and flexible construct that supplies the emotional foundation for change, transformational leadership is a unique concept that supports the nature of the atomic model of change.

**Transactional Leadership**

Transactional leadership, on the other hand, is an exchange, or a transaction between leaders and followers of external rewards offered in return for compliance and effort (Bass, 1997). Transactional leadership does not depend on strong relationships and does not specifically seek to supply emotional support to followers. Transactional leaders often avoid risk and are most successful during times of stability (Boga & Ensari, 2009). According to Bass (1997), people working within transactional situations compete for position or status while transformational groups work in concert and share
common goals. Leadership based on the transaction of rewards in exchange for compliance and punishment for failure, cannot lead to successful organizational change (Bass, 1997; Boga & Ensari, 2009). According to Burns (1978), “real change means the creation of new conditions that will generate their own changes in motivations, new goals, and continuing change” (p. 441).

Unfortunately, most planners of change focus on the technical and administrative aspects of the program and neglect important emotional, psychological and structural forces (Burns, 1978; Boga & Ensari, 2009; Schein, 2004; Sebrant, 2008). Managerial social norms often view the act of emotional leadership as too soft and nebulous to be taken seriously (Kotter, 1996). However, offering only external motivators as the product of transactional leadership will not elevate employees to the level where they give their best effort to the organization (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). For Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), the emotional responsibility of the leader is the most important aspect of leading organizations; they write:

the leader sets the emotional standard. Leaders give praise or withhold it, criticize well or destructively, offer support or turn a blind eye to people’s needs. They can form the group’s mission in ways that give more meaning to each person’s contribution – or not. They can guide in ways that give people a sense of clarity and direction in their work and that encourages flexibility, setting people free to use their best sense of how to get the job done (p. 9).

According to Dirkx (2008), transformative learning is a challenging field to navigate and the process is often impeded by emotional obstructions. It is insufficient for the leader or the learning to simply recognize the need to learn change as a rational exercise; rather the learning and leadership paradigm must acknowledge the emotional dimension as the central tenet of experience, learning and change. As the catalyst for successful change,
organizations require emotionally intelligent and emotionally supportive leadership to inspire sustainable learning and transformation.

**Part Four: Emotional Intelligence and Self-Efficacy**

The third component of the atomic model of organizational change is the necessary psychological safety established through the development of self-efficacy. Organizational change often leads to a number of emotional responses including fear, anxiety, sorrow, joy, and excitement (Kotter, 1996). Human emotion is perceived through changes in one’s environment, therefore, when individual perceptions are challenged and when personal meaning structures no longer satisfy one’s frame of reference, anxiety is produced (Ben Ze’ev, 2000). Understanding emotion is the key to navigating change, and for many people, emotional change requires leadership and support. Leaders help to manage the meaning of the group by facilitating the individual and collective interpretations of changing circumstances (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The most effective agents of change and the strongest organizational leaders possess the ability to sense the emotional tone of employees and intervene appropriately (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). The emotional tone of the workplace is contagious and can influence the direction and the success of learning and change programs (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). The emotional capacity for learning and change through transformational leadership is more than about getting to know the people in an office; it is a fundamental course of action that validates and supports the emotional safety of employees and leads to the development and sustainability of personal and organizational efficacy (Nielson & Munir, 2009).
Leading organizations during times of turbulence and transformation demands at least a basic level of emotional intelligence to perceive and support the emotional responses of the workplace (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Mayer, Salovey, and Caruso (2004) define emotional intelligence as the “capacity to reason about emotions, and of emotions to enhance thinking. It includes the ability to accurately perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth” (p. 197). Emotional intelligence transpires primarily through relationships and develops close working teams (Goleman, Boyatziz & McKee, 2002). Emotionally intelligent leaders, therefore, invest time and energy developing meaningful relationships with co-workers for the specific purpose of enhancing the affective resilience and the group dynamics that are essential to increased productivity in the workplace. Moreover, emotionally intelligent leaders are capable of gaining access to the anxieties of others and provide the others with access to their own anxieties. Emotionally intelligent relationships breed a level of transparency that develops a foundation of honesty and trust within the organization (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). It is emotional leadership that develops the necessary working climate for successful learning and change. Relationship deficient and topical organizational learning programs rarely lead to true and sustainable organizational change (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Deep learning and change occurring at work requires individuals to have strong working relationships in order to engage with each other through critical reflection, inquiry and continuous improvement. Emotional intelligence can be a learned skill and develops through four main clusters of emotional competencies including: self-awareness,
management, social awareness and relationship management. Leaders rarely master all four competencies and must insulate themselves with people who possess complimentary emotional attributes (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002).

*Four Dimensions of Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002).

The self-awareness cluster includes three key competencies of emotional self-awareness, accurate self-assessment and self-confidence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). The self-awareness cluster develops leaders’ ability to accurately understand how to use their strengths and isolate their weaknesses. Leaders with strong emotional self-awareness understand the depths of their limitations and seek out feedback to improve. Self-aware leaders also use their mistakes as learning opportunities and find ways to support everyone within the group (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). People with developed
competencies in the self-awareness cluster tend to be strong leaders and strong performers in the organization. The self-aware domain leads to a realistic sense of one’s leadership ability and provides a more convincing approach to leading change (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002).

The self-awareness cluster leads to the domain of self-management. Once leaders have developed a strong awareness of their emotional capacity, they can begin to manage their emotions with organizational aims. Self-management encompasses six competencies including emotional self-control, transparency, adaptability, achievement, initiative and optimism. Leaders cannot provide proper emotional support during episodes of transformation without managing their own emotions first (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The ability to remain calm in stressful situations through emotional self-management is important for leaders during organizational change and transformative learning (Neilson & Munir, 2009; Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Moreover the leaders ability to be transparent, adapt and remain optimistic throughout the stages of change supplies the emotional sustenance to proceed towards the end goal. For Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002), “the most meaningful act of responsibility that leaders can do is to control their own state of mind” (p. 47). Successful organizational change and transformative learning depends on the strength of emotional leadership.

Leaders with a strong emotional sense of self are more capable to influence the emotional state of others through the social awareness cluster. Social awareness includes three main competencies of empathy, organizational awareness and service. The leaders’ ability to empathize gives them an insight into the general and specific emotional tone of the organization (cherniss & Goleman, 2001). The empathetic leader can accurately
assess and intervene on key non-verbal cues within the organization’s climate. Empathy is a vital component to creating resonance in the organization and supporting the transformative learning needs of employees (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002; Neilson & Munir, 2009). Empathetic leaders appear approachable; they validate people’s concerns and they are the key piece to promoting complete organizational effectiveness (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). The empathetic leader provides the necessary emotional support to lead successful organizational change and meaningful learning in the workplace.

The empathetic and socially aware leader is capable of creating and maintaining the final set of emotional intelligence competencies of relationship management. The relationship management cluster includes competencies of inspirational leadership, influence, developing others, change catalyst, conflict management and teamwork and collaboration. Skillfully managing relationships requires the accurate and intentional treatment of people’s emotions (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Relationship management is not just about organizational success, is it also about developing people to grow in personal and meaningful ways. Relationship management gives credit to the entire group and operates under the assumption that nothing gets done alone (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001). Leaders who manage relationships in the workplace create higher functioning teams and retain talent more effectively (Matthews & Candy, 1999). Organizations that create efficient teams produce high quality work and learn together in deeper and more meaningful ways (Matthews & Candy, 1999). “Because most groups and organizations revolve around the status quo, fighting off anything that threatens it, this level of change requires courageous leadership, stamina and unswerving
commitment” (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002, P. 230). In order for organizations to provide the stamina and commitment to change, a strong foundation of personal and organizational efficacy is required. In this way, successful organizational change engages in transformative learning and emotional leadership.

**Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1995; 1997) explains self-efficacy as one’s perceived belief in their capabilities to organize and execute particular strategies required to manage prospective situations. Employees that show high levels of self-efficacy are more willing and capable to deal with stress associated with change and report higher levels of emotional well-being (Nielsen & Munir, 2009). A great deal of one’s self-knowledge and personal meaning is comprised of a well-established sense of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Bandura (1995) describes the development of self-efficacy to be the result of the four primary sources, including *mastery experiences* (indicators of capability), *vicarious experiences* (transfer of competencies and comparison with others), *verbal persuasion* (social influence of capabilities) and *physiological responses* (capabilities and strength against vulnerability or failure). An accumulation of mastery experiences is the most effective source of self-efficacy development. Employees must be provided with adequate time to work with new skills, new processes or new knowledge to develop a sense of mastery with the intended organizational change and as people begin to believe they have the capability to succeed, they persevere through times of difficulty, uncertainty and transformation (Bandura, 1997). “Those who have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides and supports for performance. Those who doubt their efficacy visualize failure scenarios and dwell on the
many things that can go wrong. It is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt” (Bandura, 1995, p. 6).

Establishing a strong sense of self-efficacy and supportive exchange of psychological safety in the workplace can drive employees to give their best effort. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2002) refer to the effect of high functioning employees and organizations as *resonance*. Dissonance, on the other hand, undermines the emotional responses that lead to high performing organizations. The emotional significance of leadership and self-efficacy therefore, is key for transformative learning and organizational change. Mezirow (1991) suggests that an individual is unable to act on a new learning if the experience is too emotionally threatening:

The power of the threat presented by actions inspired by a new meaning perspective depends upon the nature of the threat, how pressing the disorienting dilemma was that initiated the process, and how effectively the learner has personalized and integrated into his or her experience what has been learned about the epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic forces that affect his or her way of understanding (Mezirow, 1991, p. 171).

Emotionally intelligent leadership and the sources of self-efficacy, most importantly mastery experiences, provide a measured approach to learning and afford employees and leaders appropriate time and space to work through strategic changes in the workplace. Employees are more willing to change when the process is emotionally rewarding which leads to a more engaged and committed workforce (Goleman, Boyatzis & McKee, 2002). Organizations that deliberately provide employees with mastery experiences, positive co-worker modeling, and emotionally supportive feedback increase the sense of occupational efficacy within the group and increase organizational productivity (Bandura, 1997). Organizational efficacy develops the emotional capacity and the willingness of employees to change by confidently recognizing and responding to
volatile economic climates, establishing incremental improvements on existing products and services and encouraging the innovative process to continue creating new products or services (Bandura, 1997). Solving problems and navigating the process of change as a member of a group largely depends on the corporate belief in the group’s collective capabilities. The strength of employees’ perceived sense of self-efficacy, then, is an important element of the necessary emotional support required for leading transformative learning and meaningful organizational change.

The concept of self-efficacy provides leaders with a practical method of developing the emotional strength needed for leading transformative learning and organizational change (Neilsen & Munir, 2009). Leaders can empower employees by providing mastery experiences with the new knowledge, validate the learning experience vicariously through peer models, offer feedback and positive verbal persuasion and help employees to understand that the feelings they are experiencing are common. The emotional support for learning afforded through the measured implementation of self-efficacy in the workplace enables the transformative learning process to occur, thereby facilitating a more efficient and effective progression of organizational change. According to Mezirow (1991), “the transformative learning process is irreversible once completed; that is, once our understanding is clarified and we have committed ourselves fully to taking the action it suggests, we do not regress to levels of less understanding” (p. 152). It is the aim of the atomic model of organizational change to promote an irreversible transformation in the workplace that produces positive returns, increased productivity and inspired learning organizations. Leaders of organizational change must accurately assess and implement the rotating sources of transformative learning,
transformative leadership and the psychological safety developed through self-efficacy according to the unique needs of their organization and staff team.

**Summary**

The essence of adult education for Eduard Lindeman (1925), “is to discover the meaning of experience; a quest of the mind which digs down to the roots of the preconceptions which formulate conduct; a technique of learning for adults which makes education coterminous with life, and hence elevates living itself to the level of an experiment” (as cited in Britton, 1996, p. 7). The atomic model of organizational change is similar to Lindeman (1925) in the sense that its implementation is a daily exercise and respects the importance of life and living within its own context. Change is a complex and often uncomfortable psychosocial process that requires leadership and emotional support to be successful. Kotter (1996) suggests that organizational change occurs through an eight-stage process:

1. Establishing a sense of urgency
2. Creating the guiding coalition
3. Developing a vision and strategy
4. Communicating the change vision
5. Empowering broad-based action
6. Generating short term wins
7. Consolidating gains and producing more change
8. Anchoring new approaches in the culture

Lewin (1945), however, argues that a step-by-step approach to leading organizational change is impracticable because of the sheer complexity of the task and
the amount of unforeseen circumstances that will inevitably arise throughout the change initiative. The atomic model of organizational change identified here supports the facilitation of step-by-step processes of change as a guiding model only. Organizations categorically progress through stages during times of intentional change, however the process is not a linear progression. The social and emotional complexity of workplace transformation requires a fluid and innovative framework that can improvise and adapt according to unique and unforeseen challenges. The atomic model accentuates three fundamental processes of transformative learning, transformative leadership and self-efficacy as the catalyst for successfully facilitating the stages of organizational change.

The three fundamental processes of the atomic model operate in synthesis with any intentional organizational change program. The atomic model provides a specific and comprehensive framework for facilitating the complex human dynamics of the
organizational change process. The greatest challenge of leading organizational change programs is not knowledge or organizational structures, it is not processes or strategic plans; the greatest challenge of leading change is the emotional responses of people. The atomic model of organizational change validates emotion and empowers people to learn and grow. Under the atomic model, people within organizations are supported through the change process by meaningful transformative learning, transformative leadership and offered the psychological safety of self-efficacy. The atomic model allows leaders to be innovative within each of the stages of change and provides a backdrop for leaders to understand the unique needs of each employee within the organization. Leaders of change should possess basic levels of emotional intelligence to accurately perceive the emotional climate of the organization and intervene with appropriate levels of transformative learning, transformative leadership or self-efficacy depending on the needs of the situation.

Successful organizational change is possible if the emotional capacity of people is enhanced and supported throughout the entire process. As employees redefine their personal meaning structures within the context of the new organization and learn to effectively utilize new knowledge and skills in the workplace, leaders must constantly survey and support the organization with reciprocating focus on transformative learning and emotional leadership. The atomic model of organizational change unifies the psychosocial complexity of leading transformation in the workplace making the process of change coterminous with life.
References


Following critical theory, this paper challenges the traditional and highly popularized frameworks of leading organizational change. Originating out of the Frankfurt School, critical theory encourages ongoing inquiry of the basic values and assumptions that sustain social structures and aims to deconstruct the assimilated truths in the social, political, and economic world (Oldfield, 2010). The focus of critical theory is not only on deconstruction, rather, it seeks to promote new knowledge and offer alternative methods of thought and practice (Vaandering, 2010). In accordance with critical theory, the atomic model of organizational change questions the current framework and offers a unique and fresh method of leadership for engaging people and inspiring learning and change in the workplace.