

Chapter 65

Fostering Innovation in the Midst of Organizational Change: Dialogically with a Sensemaking Narrative Approach

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ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the definitional links between innovation, organizational change, organizational culture, organizational climate, and dialogic communication. In the 21st century context of nano-second change across organizations, understanding these concepts, their nexus for practical purposes, and the value of dialogic narratives help frame the “stories” of innovative processes that construct change. Current change cases such as Saturday Mail, Should We Make Cents, due process removal for Colorado public service providers, and Colorado Open Space “Nature Play” constructions are examined to apply a theoretical framework for this complex process of innovation through dialogue. An organizational tool modeled after Bingo is demonstrated as an aid in constructing and shaping the organizational change narrative while incorporating diverse dialogues in the communication process.

INTRODUCTION

In the 21st century, life and work in organizations around the globe has changed and continues changing at a nano-second rate while the demands upon individuals and organizations escalate commensurate with the levels of diversity, needs for creative and innovative problem-solving and different modes of communicating both internally and externally among stakeholders. Though technology aids and abets the pressure upon organizations undergoing change, advancing beyond technological solutions may prompt improved and different answers. At the same time, stressing technological structures within an organiza-

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-1913-3.ch065

tion may be a core means of requiring human dialogue for a successful end (Amabile & Gryskiewicz, 1987; Ashford & Cummings, 1985; Cummings, 1965; Ettlie, 1983). Agreement about approaches varies across disciplines and across research, but one constant in the changing world is recognition that different approaches are necessary in a knowledge economy, an economy that is far different from the agrarian and manufacturing economies of the past.

This chapter defines and analyzes concepts, terms, and approaches to contemporary organizational change concerns, focusing on applying these terms and concepts to organizational case studies of interest, albeit case studies that are “in progress” and as yet incomplete in their outcomes. For the last four decades, organizational communication scholars such as Eisenberg (Eisenberg, 2007; Eisenberg, Andrews, Murphy, & Laine-Timmerman, 1999; Eisenberg, Goodall & Trethwey, 2010; Eisenberg & Riley, 1988; Monge, Farace, & Eisenberg, 1984; Monge, Rothman, Eisenberg, Miller, & Kirste, 1985), Poole (Poole, 1985; Conrad & Poole, 1998; Van de Ven & Poole, 2005), Schein (Schein, 1985, 1990, 1999); and Weick (Weick & Browning, 1986; Weick, 1987a, 1987b, 1995) have defined, examined, and researched organizational concepts such as organizational climate, organizational culture, and sensemaking theory as they relate to prospects for innovation and creativity. Creating virtual organizations (virtualized through technology) has only intensified the focus on organizational change. With the advent of virtuality, the existence of an organization through communication becomes that much more salient and meaningful – beyond the physical constructions of organizational space previously vital in a pre-technological society. Organizational cultures and climates -- phenomena that frame all organizational activities including communication -- are socially (Berger & Luckmann, 1966) and psychologically constructed (Kelly, 1955). These phenomena heavily impact innovative and creative endeavors both within and without an organization today (Amabile, 1996; Sharifirad & Ataei, 2012). Ultimately, the rate of organizational change today reciprocally affects the construction of organizational cultures and climates such that ongoing construing (both personally and socially creating meaning and realities) demands continual and intensive communication efforts.

This chapter defines organizational terms and parses their relationships to each other, following with analyses of organizational case studies such as the USPS Saturday Mail, the US Mint issues related to the costs of producing pennies, a Colorado Open Space “Nature Play” construction, and the removal of due process for public service providers (Colorado firefighters and police personnel) related to behavioral offenses. These case study analyses are used to frame questions of dialogic concerns confronting the diverse organizational world of change. Examining cases that are unfolding (not concluded) demonstrates the need for navigating change as an ongoing form of rational sensemaking that demands dialogic construction; thus modeling the “give and take” of social and individual construing without a rigid form, while integrating attentiveness and mindful approach that better serves the changing world.

An organizational tool formed using stakeholder theory (Freeman, 2010; Friedman & Niles, 2002; Lewis, 2011; Mahoney, 2012; Savage, Bunn, Gray, Xiao, Wang, Wilson, & Williams, 2010;), Organizational Change Game, is employed to analyze these case studies as well as proposed to implement a dialogic framework for each case. This tool serves to combine specific components of organizational change into a narrative structure that can serve internal stakeholders in creating a co-constructed story using the other terms and concepts of focus here, i.e., organizational culture and climate, sensemaking, and organizational communication. It is important to note that this tool, while proposed, provides a descriptive method, not a prescriptive method, for the dialogue that ensues explores the innovative options that could prescribe change in the organization.

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