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**THE USE OF MINDFULNESS IN DEALING WITH AMBIGUITY DURING  
TRANSFORMATIONAL ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

**A Research Project**

**Presented to the Faculty of**

**The George L. Graziadio**

**School of Business and Management**

**Pepperdine University**

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**In Partial Fulfillment**

**of the Requirements for the Degree**

**Master of Science**

**in**

**Organization Development**

---

**by**

**Avonlie Wylson**

**August 2015**

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This research project, completed by

AVONLIE WYLSON

under the guidance of the Faculty Committee and approved by its members, has been submitted to and accepted by the faculty of The George L. Graziadio School of Business and Management in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE  
IN ORGANIZATION DEVELOPMENT

Date: August 2015

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## **Abstract**

The present mixed-methods study examined how 19 experienced change leaders cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and whether mindfulness helps them do that. Study findings indicated that practitioners react in varying ways to ambiguity and employees generally react negatively. Change leaders rely on personal coping and project initiation strategies, ongoing guidance and support, agile and action-oriented approaches, courageous and bold leadership, and trust in their process to manage ambiguity for themselves. To help others deal with ambiguity, change leaders repeatedly articulate the change vision and direction and demonstrate confident, strong change leadership. Mindfulness appears to enhance leaders' abilities to interact with others, maintain perspective, and attune with others' emotional states. Mindful change leaders appear to more frequently practice self-awareness and self-care, seek professional advice and assistance, and exercise an agile, action-oriented approach to leading change as ambiguity coping mechanisms.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	iii
List of Tables .....	viii
1. Introduction.....	1
Purpose of the Study .....	4
Significance of the Study .....	4
Researcher Background .....	4
Organization of the Study .....	6
2. Literature Review.....	7
Definitions.....	7
Organizational Change.....	10
Developmental change.....	11
Transitional change.....	12
Transformational change .....	12
Leading Change .....	24
Definition of change leadership .....	24
Change leaders .....	25
Leadership during ambiguity .....	31
Mindfulness.....	33
Mindfulness outcomes .....	37
Practicing mindfulness.....	38
Outcomes of mindfulness .....	39
Applications and uses within organizations.....	41

Measuring mindfulness .....	43
Mindful leadership .....	47
Applications of mindfulness for dealing with ambiguity and organizational change .....	49
Summary .....	50
3. Research Methods .....	53
Research Design.....	53
Quantitative phase.....	55
Qualitative phase.....	55
Sequencing of data collection .....	56
Sampling Size and Strategy .....	58
Selection criteria .....	58
Selection procedures .....	59
Selection process.....	60
Ethical Considerations .....	62
Data Collection Procedures.....	62
Survey .....	62
Interview script .....	64
Data Analysis Procedures .....	64
Summary .....	65
4. Results.....	66
Participant Demographics.....	67
Effects of Ambiguity.....	69

Effects of ambiguity on change leaders .....	69
Effects of ambiguity on employees.....	71
Other effects of ambiguity .....	73
Change Leaders' Coping and Management Strategies for Ambiguity .....	75
Helping Others Deal with Ambiguity .....	79
Use of Mindfulness During Transformational Organizational Change .....	90
Effects of mindfulness on the change leader .....	90
Effect of leaders' mindfulness on others .....	94
Usefulness of mindfulness training for change leaders .....	96
Comparison of Strategies Used by High and Low Mindfulness Practitioners .....	97
Coping with their experience of ambiguity .....	98
Helping others to deal with ambiguity.....	104
Communications as a way to help others deal with ambiguity.....	105
Capacity building strategies for dealing with ambiguity .....	107
Summary .....	109
5. Discussion.....	111
Conclusions.....	111
Impact of ambiguity on transformational organizational change participants.....	111
Strategies and techniques used by experienced change leaders to manage ambiguity.....	113
Uses of mindfulness for managing ambiguity during transformational organizational change .....	116

Comparison of ambiguity strategies used by high-mindfulness and low-mindfulness change leaders .....	118
Recommendations.....	119
Limitations .....	121
Suggestions for Research.....	123
Summary.....	125
References.....	127
Appendix A: Request for Nominees.....	136
Appendix B: Online Participant Consent Form.....	138
Appendix C: Demographic Questions .....	140
Appendix D: Mindfulness Questionnaire .....	143
Appendix E: Interview Script .....	145



## List of Tables

Table	Page
1. A Comparison of Some Necessary Attributes for Leading Change .....	27
2. Leadership Dimensions Questionnaire Profile for the Engaging Leadership Style....	30
3. The Benefits of Mindfulness .....	40
4. Mindfulness Instruments .....	45
5. Participant Demographics .....	67
6. Participants' Change Efforts .....	69
7. Effects on Change Leader .....	69
8. Effects on Employees.....	71
9. Other Effects of Ambiguity.....	74
10. Change Leaders' Self-Oriented Coping and Management Strategies.....	76
11. Change Leadership Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity .....	80
12. Communication Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity.....	83
13. Capacity Building Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity .....	86
14. Effects of Mindfulness on Change Leader .....	90
15. Use of Mindfulness to Manage Ambiguity.....	92
16. Effect of Leaders' Mindfulness on Others .....	94
17. Usefulness of Mindfulness Training for Change Leaders.....	96
18. Participants' Mindfulness Scores .....	98
19. Change Leaders' Self-Oriented Coping and Management Strategies: High Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners .....	99

Table	Page
20. Change Leadership Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity: High	
Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners .....	104
21. Communication Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity: High	
Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners .....	106
22. Capacity Building Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity: High	
Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners .....	108

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

The dynamics of today's business environments frequently require transformational organizational change. Conditions such as globalization, rapidly accelerating technological advancement, and economic turmoil have rocked the business world meaning that both the pace and nature of change have shifted, thus requiring organizations to undergo transformational change more frequently than they have had to in the past. Transformational change, defined by Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson as requiring "a radical shift of strategy, structure, systems, processes or technology," typically means that dramatic changes to the underlying organizational culture are also needed (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 60). Transformational change is "so significant that it requires a shift of culture, behavior, and mindset to implement successfully and sustain over time" (p. 60).

In transformational change, by definition the outcome of the change is not knowable at the outset. This is distinctly different from established thinking around organizational change, which is that senior management can follow a series of steps or a predetermined plan to enact the change they seek (Graetz & Smith, 2010; Worley & Mohrman, 2014). Transformational organizational change, therefore, creates a high degree of ambiguity for members of the organization who are participating in the change effort. There is generally much uncertainty throughout the process, as forward movement through the change requires simultaneously incorporating the many and varied viewpoints of multiple, usually high-level, stakeholders (Gioia, Nag, & Corley, 2012).

Ambiguity arises because the organization and its members can't rely on what worked for them in the past but must instead create new ways of operating in order to

bring about the transformational change. While this ambiguous state is a necessary and natural byproduct of transformational organizational change, it creates problems for organizations because most people are not naturally skilled at dealing with either change or ambiguity nor do they enjoy it (Shin, Taylor, & Seo, 2012). As well, ambiguity can be unsettling and anxiety-provoking for all concerned, and this may impair organization members' willingness and ability to change. It is often the case that ambiguity causes people to feel uncomfortable about what change will mean to them and how they will be personally affected by the change. Employees often assume that organizational changes will affect them negatively (Fugate, Kinicki, & Prussia, 2008). Neuroscience research tells us that when people feel uncertain about possible future outcomes, the resulting stress may cause them to overestimate the degree to which those possible future outcomes will be negative (Sarinopoulos et al., 2010). Studies also suggest "people differ in their need for certainty and their ability to tolerate uncertain or ambiguous situations" (Rock & Cox, 2012, p. 133). Operating in a state of ambiguity can cause poor productivity, poor decision-making, employee turnover, failure of the change effort and failure of the organization to reach its stated or desired goals.

Mindfulness can be a powerful way to manage ambiguity and promote positive outcomes (Gärtner, 2013). To successfully navigate to the desired end state of a transformational organizational change, employees and senior management alike must be present moment-by-moment (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). In the literature, mindfulness is most often defined as "being attentive to and aware of what is taking place in the present" (Gondo, Patterson, & Palacios, 2013, p. 37). The concept of mindfulness can be applied to both individuals and organizations and in either case is a useful state to help keep focus on what is actually occurring, giving both individuals and organizations

the potential to respond mindfully instead of automatically (Gärtner, 2013; Ray, Baker, & Plowman, 2011). Research has shown that the state of mindfulness helps an organization to prepare for change (Gärtner, 2013). At the individual level, people who are mindful find it easier to go with the flow and are better able to cope with an extensive transformational change.

Some scholars have looked at extending the concept of individual mindfulness to the organizational level, with a concept known as organizational mindfulness (Guiette, Matthysens, & Vandenbempt, 2014; Vogus & Sutcliffe, 2012; Weick & Putnam, 2006). This involves increasing an organization's capacity to focus, at the organizational level, present-moment awareness and attention in order to create new distinctions around how the organization responds to change cues and stimuli, as opposed to reacting in automatic and familiar ways, and depending less on conceptualizations that may be outdated (Guiette et al., 2014; Weick & Putnam, 2006; Weick & Sutcliffe, 2006). It has been proposed in the literature that four characteristics (learning, open communication, supportive working relationships and participative decision-making) are enhanced by mindfulness at the collective level and that these are antecedents of organizational readiness for change (Gärtner, 2013). In today's organizations, while change is often thought of as something that "happens to" or is "controlled by" the organization and its members, research suggests that "environmental pressures and chance circumstances" often interact "to shape the emergence and development of an organizational situation" (MacKay & Chia, 2013, p. 211). Cultivating mindful organizing is proposed to be a more useful way of "dealing with the unintended consequences of action in a messy and constantly changing world" (p. 226). By utilizing mindful organizing, an organization

stays focused on “the emergent process that unfolds during implementation of strategic change” (Guiette et al., 2014, p. 615).

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study examined how experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and whether mindfulness helps them do that. The research questions are:

1. How does ambiguity during transformational organizational change affect participants in that change?
2. What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change?
3. In what ways might mindfulness help experienced change leaders during transformational organizational change?
4. Do change leaders with high levels of mindfulness deal with ambiguity differently than low mindfulness change leaders?

### **Significance of the Study**

While there has been some research on the role and benefits of mindfulness in business, it does not appear that research has determined the degree to which mindfulness plays a role in a leader’s ability to lead change and how it might influence how others in the organization experience the change process (Dhiman, 2009; Hawkins, 2010; Hülshager, Alberts, Feinholdt, & Lang, 2013; Roche, Haar, & Luthans, 2014). At the conclusion of this study, we will better understand whether mindfulness can be an effective mechanism for enhancing the transformational change process as well as a positive influence on the way that participants experience the change itself.

### **Researcher Background**

At the time I began working on my thesis, I was a Senior Manager of Customer Advocacy for a well-known software company. I have always been interested in

improving myself through personal and professional growth, and I have participated in a number of programs over the years to make this happen. Although I have been aware of the concept of mindfulness and of various practices that one might institute to become more mindful, I hadn't actually taken any steps to implement any. In the fall of 2013, during my first trimester of the Master's of Science in Organization Development program at Pepperdine University, we studied the topic of neuroscience and, in our assigned reading, many references were made to the benefits of a regular mindfulness practice for the brain and for engaging in life more fully. I became fascinated with both neuroscience and mindfulness and have continued to read about it on my own, which has made me even more curious and intentional about being mindful.

At the same time, at work I was on a team that was focused on improving the experiences of our customers and driving a more customer centric culture across the organization. Although the company has always cared about giving customers a great experience, the formalized customer advocacy program was relatively nascent and I found that, for me, there was a great deal of ambiguity in my role as the customer experience and advocacy program continued to grow, develop, and gain traction within the area of the company where I worked.

One day, when I was frustrated with myself and wishing I were more effective as a change leader, I started thinking about leaders in our company who were very effective at leading change and I began wondering if mindfulness played any role in their success as change leaders. I speculated that being mindful might help change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during organizational change. I wondered if that was true and whether it would be worthwhile to promote mindfulness within organizations for that purpose. As I learned more about the subject of organizational change, I realized that the

need for mindfulness might be greatest in relation to transformational change, due to the immense ambiguity involved in such change initiatives. Upon reflection, this seemed like a natural focus for my research.

This research project is fueled by personal interest as well. Someone once said that people teach what they most need to learn. Perhaps it is also true that people research what they most need to study and incorporate into their lives. I am using this research project to inspire and mobilize myself to start my own mindfulness practice.

### **Organization of the Study**

The present chapter discussed the rationale for the study, the study purpose and research questions, study significance, and the researcher background.

Chapter 2 provides key definitions and reviews the primary bodies of literature in support of the present study, including organizational change, change leadership, and mindfulness.

Chapter 3 describes the methods that were used to conduct the present study, including the overarching research design, participants, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures. The chapter closes with a discussion of the study's limitations and delimitations.

Chapter 4 presents the results emerging from the present study, organized by research question.

Chapter 5 discusses the key findings, recommendations, limitations, and directions for future research.



## Chapter 2

### Literature Review

The purpose of this study is to examine how experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and to determine whether mindfulness helps them do that. The research questions are:

1. How does ambiguity during transformational organizational change affect participants in that change?
2. What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change?
3. In what ways might mindfulness help experienced change leaders during transformational organizational change?
4. Do change leaders with high levels of mindfulness deal with ambiguity differently than low mindfulness change leaders?

This chapter reviews theory and research relevant to that purpose. The chapter starts with definitions to ground this study followed by a review of organization change. The role of the change leader is then examined. Finally, mindfulness as a technique for use during change leadership is considered.

#### Definitions

For the purposes of this study, the following definitions will be used:

Ambiguity: a state of uncertainty where causal relationships are unclear or there are multiple possible interpretations or vagueness in precise meaning (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Horney, Pasmore, & O'Shea, 2010). There are generally three types of situations that generate ambiguity: (a) completely new situations that don't resemble anything seen or experienced previously; (b) very complex situations where there are so many patterns that it is difficult to process and/or make sense of them; and (c) situations

that contradict each other, where it is difficult to reconcile one with the other (Nicolaidis & Katsaros, 2011).

Change leader: For this study, change leadership includes all three of the following characteristics: (a) holding a senior position in an organization (director or above) OR being an external consultant to senior leadership; (b) playing a leadership role in an organizational change initiative, either as a team leader (with direct reports) and/or as a change leader (individual contributor or a team leader); and (c) carrying out strategic tasks during the change initiative, helping envision and determine the business case for a change initiative and/or helping engage organization members in executing the change. Change leadership encompasses “vision, values, strategy, empowerment, and motivation and inspiration” (Gill, 2003, p. 307).

Change management: a “systematic, iterative and structured approach to personal, group level, or organizational transitions from an ‘as-is’ to a ‘to-be’ state of existence” (Thomas, 2014, p. 3).

Experienced change leader: For this study, an experienced change leader has played a key role in initiating and implementing at least one strategic, transformational change project.

Mindfulness: Mindfulness consists of purposefully keeping one’s attention focused on the present moment without judgment and also involves the act of bringing one’s attention back to the moment after it has been drawn away (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). It is a state of consciousness where the mindful person is more likely to behave differently than they might have previously, to be unattached to decisions they may have made in the past and to be more resilient when faced with unexpected challenges (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Chatzisarantis & Hagger, 2007; Gärtner, 2011).

Mindful change leader: In addition to the qualities contained in the definitions of change leader and experienced change leader, a change leader who is mindful exhibits the trait of mindfulness and brings that to their work. Leading mindfully includes being self-aware and fully focused in the present moment. Mindful change leaders can keep the big picture in mind while at the same time responding to what comes up in the present moment, ensuring that other members of the organization act in consideration of this (Higgs & Rowland, 2011).

Transformational organizational change: Transformational organizational change involves “a radical shift of strategy, structure, systems, processes or technology” (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 60) where the organization must start working on the change process before the final outcome is fully known and defined (i.e., the final outcome is emergent as a result of the change process). In transformational change, the magnitude and/or breadth of the organizational change is so significant that a shift of culture, behavior, and mindset is required to implement the change successfully and sustain it over time (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010); the change is both long-term and organization-wide; and the organization must reorganize and/or significantly change the way it does business (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Puleo, 2011). Examples of transformational change initiatives include (but are not limited to): (a) changing an organization’s structure from a traditional hierarchy into self-directing teams; (b) re-engineering business processes across an entire organization; (c) overcoming a business crisis by significantly changing business processes; and/or (d) radical changes to a company’s products, services and/or go-to-market strategy. Transformational change creates a high degree of uncertainty for members of the

organization who participate in the change effort, which can be unsettling and anxiety-provoking for all concerned.

### **Organizational Change**

Organizations are generally formed to improve circumstances in some way (Zander, 1985). In this study, organizations are considered to be economic institutions that are formed around a particular purpose or to achieve a certain mission. They are companies and/or corporations that are defined by their legal charter as well as the strategies and processes they adopt to achieve their business objectives (Duhaime, Stimpert, & Chesley, 2012). Accomplishing the mission requires organizations not only to sort out how they're going to do the work and secure resources, but also, as open systems, they are inextricably interconnected with their environments (Cummings & Worley, 2009). What is going on in the larger environment affects the performance of the organization, and the environment is also affected by what happens within the organization.

The environments in which today's companies operate and compete are dynamic rather than static (Duhaime et al., 2012; Graetz & Smith, 2010; Wren & Dulewicz, 2005). As well, many organizations' external national and global environments have been subject to rapidly increasing change, not to mention the increased pace of technological innovation of the past few decades (Callan, 1993; Cameron, 2008; Puleo, 2011; Roche et al., 2014; Sethi, 2009). "It is the age of ambiguity. We live in a turbulent era that requires our institutions to change with dramatically changing times" (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 364). Disruptive change is becoming the norm, with numerous disturbances and unforeseen events occurring on what seems to be a regular basis (Boudreau & Ziskin, 2011; Graetz & Smith, 2010; Nadler & Tushman, 1990). An apt term used to describe these rapid and

disruptive environmental influences that organizations are now constantly experiencing is the word *turbulence* (McCann & Selsky, 2012). What this implies is that the need for change and improvement has become constant and there is continual pressure on organizations to be adaptable, agile, and responsive (Higgs & Rowland, 2001; Puleo, 2011; Worley & Mohrman, 2014).

In today's world, organizational change is common and is usually instigated in response to some type of influence to which the organization must respond in order to remain "productive and competitive" (Chrusciel, 2004, p. 17). Organizational change is necessary when shifts in an organization's environment require a response that the organization is not currently equipped to deliver (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Meyer, Brooks, & Goes, 1990; Nadler, Shaw, & Walton, 1994). These environmental influences necessitate a response from the organization in a variety of areas, which then drives the nature and scope of the necessary change.

One typology suggests that there are three types of organizational change, which are developmental change, transitional change, and transformational change (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Nadler et al., 1994; Reger, Mullane, Gustafson, & DeMarie, 1994). The programs that are needed to effect the change become more complex in each case.

**Developmental change.** *Developmental change*, also called incremental or planned change, is an improvement of existing ways of operating (making what the organization is already doing stronger) (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Miller, 2002; Nadler et al., 1994; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). Some examples are process improvement, team building, looking for solutions to problems that are facing the business, developing better sales capabilities, etc. This type of change is generally

addressed through training and development programs (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010).

**Transitional change.** *Transitional change* (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010), or anticipatory change (Nadler & Tushman, 1990), requires that something entirely new replace what currently exists. In this type of change, the desired future state is more or less known, as in the case of a reorganization of an organization's structure. This often occurs when a company decides to adopt a new strategy or market approach and needs to realign its organizational structure in order to deliver on its strategy. Other examples include mergers and divestitures, where a company either acquires a company or divests one. In either case, the purchase or sale means that the company needs to adapt to some new organizational state that has been consciously and specifically intended. Product development and improvements in existing policies and procedures also represent transitional change. Generally speaking, transitional change programs have a specific time frame and can best be managed using some form of generally accepted project management or change management techniques (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). Implementing a parallel structure within the organization to manage the change while the rest of the organization ensures the continued operation of the business during the change sequence is another effective way to manage transitional change.

**Transformational change.** The third type of change (and the focus of the present study) is *transformational change*, which involves profound shifts in the way a company operates in relationship to its environment that necessitate a corresponding shift in culture, behavior, and mindset in order for the change to be successful and sustained over time (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Gioia et al., 2012; Nadler et al., 1994; Nadler & Tushman, 1990; Puleo, 2011). Change of this nature has been called

discontinuous, disruptive or second-order change, a situation where entire industries are changing so rapidly and radically that the industry must not only respond to the change but must also transform as a result of these forces (McCann & Selsky, 2012; Meyer et al., 1990; Nadler et al., 1994). There are two types of discontinuous change: *metamorphosis*, when organizations are experiencing “frame-breaking” change, and *revolution*, where the industries themselves are “restructured and reconstituted during brief periods of quantum change” (Meyer et al., 1990, pp. 96–97). “Transformational change alters the culture of the institution by changing select underlying assumptions of institutional behaviors, processes and products; is deep and pervasive and affects the whole institution; is intentional; and occurs over time” (Kezar, 2013, p. 762).

Transformational change is usually in response to three kinds of stimuli, which include industry changes that alter the competitive landscape within that industry, changes in the life cycle of the company’s products, and/or changes in the dynamics within the organization itself (Cummings & Worley, 2009). An organization undertakes a transformational change when it must: (a) fundamentally change its “strategy, structure, systems, operations, products, services, or technology” to respond to changes in its environment and meet its goals and objectives; (b) commence the process of change before the outcome has been fully decided or delineated; or (c) change on such a large scale and to such a degree that the organization’s members must alter their behaviors and mindsets in order to successfully make the change (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 60; Meyer et al., 1990).

Transformational change is far more complex and uncertain for an organization than developmental or transitional change because it has a non-linear nature. In a transformational change, there is no way to know the outcome in advance. Rather, the

new state must be allowed to evolve/emerge throughout the transformative process (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). This is accomplished through making necessary adjustments throughout the process (also called ‘course correction’ or ‘trial-and-error’) based on whatever results are occurring, while at the same time keeping on a trajectory that will allow the overall vision for the change to be achieved (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). There is a tremendous degree of uncertainty and disruption inherent in a transformational change, as by definition the organization must fundamentally change its culture, meaning the way the organization conceives of itself, by changing organizational member mindsets at the same time that it changes fundamental business practices and other elements at all levels (Gioia et al., 2012).

It is not possible to manage transformative change using older models and/or the techniques that one might use to manage developmental or transitional changes (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). The best way to manage a transformational change is to avoid controlling the process, seeking information that will help guide the change initiative and paying attention to any feedback that is gathered. Indeed, there is evidence that being aware of the complexity involved is a significant factor in ensuring the success of the change itself (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). Because of this emergent nature in transformational change, ambiguity is unavoidable during the process. To become comfortable and adept during this type of change requires a mindset shift for everyone in the organization, from leaders to employees. The next section examines ambiguity and its role in transformational change in more detail.

***Ambiguity during organizational change.*** Ambiguity is defined as a state of uncertainty where causal relationships are unclear or there are multiple possible interpretations or vagueness in precise meaning (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Horney et



al., 2010). Ambiguity, therefore, occurs “where the traditional power of the hierarchy is limited, and where goals and technologies are unclear” (Denis, Langley, & Cazale, 1996, p. 673). It is a fact of organizational life today that, to some extent, just belonging to an organization creates ambiguity for its members primarily because job security is declining, technological advances are causing change in and of themselves, and there is a general propensity for businesses to change in order to meet their evolving strategic plans (Wright, 2009). From a process perspective, “strategic change under ambiguity is likely to proceed in a cyclical pattern in which periods of substantive change alternate with periods of political realignment” (Denis et al., 1996, p. 691).

Transformational organizational change is a significant event that may cause a great deal of stress for employees or amplify existing stress as they try to cope with the accompanying uncertainty, ambiguity and the feelings of personal loss that often occur during such a change (Callan, 1993; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). Along with radical and perhaps even discontinuous changes in strategy and systems that might possibly provide opportunities for employees, other challenges may also arise, such as job loss, changes in status or rank, power structure changes, increased workload (when employees are spending time implementing the change at the same time that they are carrying out their usual job duties), conflicts between members of the organization, and other effects that leave employees feeling less than masterful about the emerging situation (Puleo, 2011; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). Furthermore, it has been shown that highly uncertain situations that are very stressful for employees may cause them to overestimate the frequency with which such uncertainty is followed by a negative outcome and to have an even higher level of aversion when such events occur (Sarinopoulos et al., 2010).

Transformational change creates even greater ambiguity because it introduces elevated levels of unpredictability and instability in the organization and its environment (Callan, 1993; Gioia et al., 2012). Ambiguity is one of five stressors that tend to arise during transformational organizational change: increased workload, uncertainty and ambiguity, interpersonal conflict, unfair treatment, and perceived loss (Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). Despite the discomfort that can be inherent in ambiguity, it also may be used deliberately to keep resistance at bay by giving organization members some flexibility around how (the means) they accomplish a transformational change (the desired end state); therefore, some suggest that ambiguity can be a state to be embraced rather than avoided (Gioia et al., 2012). In fact, the ability of employees and organizations to tolerate and even thrive in ambiguous environments can have further reaching benefits beyond a successful transformative change.

In the fields of psychology, organizational behavior and management, tolerance of ambiguity is correlated with creativity, decision making, critical thinking and orientation towards diversity, positive attitudes toward risk, emotional intelligence, effective performance in new and complex learning situations, job satisfaction and coping with uncertainty. (Nicolaidis & Katsaros, 2011, p. 46)

The paradox is that, even though ambiguity is inevitable and even helpful in some ways, it is deeply unsettling for change leaders, organization leaders, and other employees and stakeholders because it requires substantial revisions to mindsets of organizational participants (Denis et al., 1996). “Revisions to institutionalized ways of knowing and understanding can only be triggered by destabilizing employees’ existing knowledge and/or frameworks for understanding and practice” (Gioia et al., 2012, p. 365). Despite its ubiquity, people typically have great difficulty with ambiguity and thus try to ignore or eliminate it (Gioia et al., 2012). Change can be inherently painful for individual human beings, both on an emotional level (Gill, 2003) and at a physical,

neurological level (Rock & Schwartz, 2007). Generally, the more ambiguous the circumstances, the more fearful participants become (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). This is partly why other types of change (e.g., developmental or transitional) can be easier for people to handle, as the direction and magnitude of the change are often known at the outset whereas the end point is unclear during the transformative process of transformational change. The next section discusses success factors for transformational change.

*Success factors for transformational change.* Examination of the literature on transformational organizational change suggests that there are a number of factors that lead to success. Many theorists have researched the critical factors a company must address in order to successfully navigate and complete a strategic or transformational change (Arbab Kash, Spaulding, Johnson, & Gamm, 2014). Models for executing successful change include Kanter, Stein, and Jick's Ten Commandments for Executing Change, Kotter's Eight-Stage Process for Successful Organizational Transformation, Luecke's Seven Steps and Fullan's Theory of Coherence Making (Arbab Kash et al., 2014; Puleo, 2011; Stich, 2008). Fullan's model is of particular interest when looking at emergent change because he viewed it from the perspective of complexity theory, as opposed to Kotter's more linear model of change (Stich, 2008). The complexity viewpoint may be more useful to manage the uncertainty, intensity, ambiguity, nonlinearity and even chaos that are characteristic of a transformational organizational change. Fullan suggests that success in the realm of transformational change requires more than good leadership skills. It requires expertise in five key themes: moral purpose, understanding change, developing relationships, knowledge building and coherence making (as cited in Stich, 2008).

Research has confirmed three success factors for achieving transformational organizational change: culture and values, business processes, and people and engagement (Arbab Kash et al., 2014; Nadler et al., 1994). Success factors outlined in other studies also seem to fit under these categories, with Stich stating that the top success factors are: vision, followership, communication, short-term gains, training and re-culturing (Stich, 2008). Chrusciel (2004) determined that the success factors needed to implement a significant change are: planning and analysis, assessment, comprehensive communication, and perception of organizational readiness to deal with change. Using the model outlined in Arbab Kash et al. (2014), each of the primary success factors for transformational organizational change will be discussed.

*Culture and values.* Transformational change causes the organizational culture to be altered by affecting the underlying framework of the organization (Kezar, 2013). In order for a change effort to be successful, there must be an alignment of culture and values between organization members and the organization itself (Arbab Kash et al., 2014). “Shared values are a key feature of a strong organizational culture (that includes beliefs, attitudes and patterns of habitual behavior) that supports a common purpose and engenders commitment to it” (Gill, 2003, p. 313). Shared vision and shared values create alignment among the members of an organization (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). Change can be encouraged and facilitated when the values of the organization and the people within the organization are in alignment, and the change leader must ensure that this alignment occurs in order to lead change effectively.

*Business processes.* An organization’s operational activities are a key success factor for change initiatives (Arbab Kash et al., 2014). This includes scoping, planning and managing the change process, as well as evaluating where the organization is now

and where it expects to be after the change has been completed (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Chrusciel, 2004).

Other success factors in this category include facilitating effective communication and providing access to information by communicating the change message at every level (Arbab Kash et al., 2014; Chrusciel, 2004). Organizations can train leaders to communicate information about the change effort (e.g., core values), use newsletters as a way to keep everyone informed, provide pre-change workshops, update recruitment strategies to improve the fit of organizational members and use other mechanisms to reduce the stress associated with a transformational organizational change (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Callan, 1993; Puleo, 2011).

*People and engagement.* The importance of the people element during transformational change cannot be overstated. “Significant change efforts, especially those that are transformational in nature, are only sustainable and enthusiastically supported if those who introduce the change capture the hearts and minds of the people” (Thomas, 2014, p. 4). Because, by definition, the transformational change process starts before the end point is fully known and defined, people in the organization must participate in the change effort rather than being ordered to go through it (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). Therefore it is important to design a whole-system engagement strategy for transformational change efforts. Professional development is a way to create capacity and to provide the support that people need to move through the change process (Stich, 2008). Research has determined that “many change efforts fail because change leaders often underestimate the central role individuals play in the change process” (Choi, 2011, p. 479). In order to successfully engage employees in a transformational change, organizations need to empower their employees to adjust to

change and to even become change drivers (Callan, 1993). This requires strong leadership and involvement across the organization, as well as training employees in the use of individual and organizational coping skills (Arbab Kash et al., 2014; Callan, 1993). Individual coping strategies can be either internal (personality based) or external (relying on the support of others) (Armenakis et al., 1993; Callan, 1993).

During a transformational change, the members of the organization must be able to look ahead to discern the nature of the change that is required and, at the same time, find a way to remain comfortable during the unfolding of the transformation (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005). Therefore processes must be put in place to provide support for people to cope with the emerging unknown and help them to personally transform along with the organization, including “mindset, behavior, skills and ways of being, working and relating” with each other (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 69).

Specific capabilities have also been identified to cope with disruptive change, such as agility, which is the capacity to move forward with alacrity to seize opportunities, and resilience, the ability to handle the change as it is happening (McCann & Selsky, 2012; Mohrman & Worley, 2009; Winby & Worley, 2014). Change leaders need to help organization members to be ready for change by helping them, and the organization, to build agility (Worley & Mohrman, 2014). In order to build the necessary resilience and agility to succeed at transformational organizational change, all levels of the organization (individual, team, organization and environment) must employ the competencies of purposefulness, awareness, tending toward action, resourcefulness and utilizing one’s network (McCann & Selsky, 2012). Some causes of failure in transformational organizational change will now be examined.

*Causes of failure in transformational change.* There is an often-quoted statistic which states that 50 - 70 percent of change efforts fail, do not meet their objectives, or are not completed (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Guiette et al., 2014; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Miller, 2002; Olson, 2008; Puleo, 2011; Reger et al., 1994; Wren & Dulewicz, 2005). Whatever the actual percentage of failure for organizational change efforts, it would seem that transformational change is the most complex, least understood, inherently most difficult change process that has also been shown to negatively affect the organizational constituents who are involved in the change (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Puleo, 2011; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005).

Transformational change can be challenging to execute because (a) there are often multiple stakeholders who have an interest in the outcome of the change, (b) they often have differing points of view on what should be changed or how the process should work and even what the goals for the change should be, and (c) all of the interested parties may be concerned that their way of working and standing within the organization may be affected or altered by the change process in ways they cannot currently foresee (Gioia et al., 2012).

The literature on transformational organizational change points to several causes of failure for this type of change.

*Not being flexible.* Many organizations are not able to learn and course-correct during change because their systems are too rigid (requiring multiple approvals, monitoring systems that are not proactive enough, lack of information sharing, inaccessible leadership, lacking ways to look at data as it emerges to see if a change in course is necessary and being data driven instead of outcome driven) (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010).

*Not staying true to the vision.* One success factor discussed in the literature that is necessary to engage organization members in a transformational change is having a clear, compelling business case for the change (Kotter, 1995; Stich, 2008). If an organization loses sight of its core purpose, vision, and values during the change process it will lose what it needs to propel the transformation to where it needs to be. Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010) point out that people are most likely to change when they understand what is at stake for the organization. To mobilize an organization towards a compelling vision of the future, a change leader must be able to articulate what that vision is and then communicate it to the organization (Gill, 2003; Kotter, 1995; Nadler et al., 1994). “Vision helps to create commitment, inspiration and motivation by connecting and aligning people intellectually and emotionally to the organization” (Gill, 2003, p. 312). Once the vision has been disseminated, the implementation team must help employees understand what they can do individually to assist in achieving the vision. In order to inspire change within organizational constituents, an effective vision is one that can be imagined, is seen to be desirable, is possible to achieve, has some flexibility and is at the same time focused, and it can be clearly communicated (Gill, 2003).

*Not taking care of people during the change process.* Many organizations and leaders underestimate the importance of dealing with “the ‘soft’ issues (culture, ethos, motivation) associated with transformation” (Wren & Dulewicz, 2005, p. 297). Transformational organizational change is inherently difficult for organization members. Change can be concerning for employees and may cause them to think of the organization with a negative perspective (Boga & Ensari, 2009). This is significant because how employees perceive the organization has been shown to be a major factor that influences morale and predicts how successful the organization will be in reaching its



goals. Not addressing employee perceptions during a change event may, in the end, negate some of the intentions and reasons for undertaking the change in the first place.

Constantly adapting to rapidly changing situations during a transformational change and, as an employee, being called to behave differently in the newly evolving organization can be stressful for change participants (Boga & Ensari, 2009). Participants must let go of personal control and tolerate myriad uncertainties during the process, including their own identities as members of the culture (Boga & Ensari, 2009; Puleo, 2011). The ambiguity and uncertainty that is associated with transformational change can amplify emotional responses which may negatively affect behaviors and productivity in the workplace (Puleo, 2011). “The imperative to transformationally change thus exerts a high price on workers, leading to stress, fear, irritation, conflict and resistance that manifest in a lack of process adoption, job dissatisfaction, decrements in work performance, and employee absenteeism and turnover” (p. 4).

*Not achieving a few quick wins.* Another cause of failure in transformation efforts is not orchestrating some successes early on to help the members of the organization feel that the change is worth all the effort necessary to make it happen (Boga & Ensari, 2009; Kotter, 1995). Employees who are involved in the change effort could burn out within the first six months if the organization doesn't pay specific attention to the workforce's perception of the change (Puleo, 2011).

Due to the challenging nature of transformational organizational change and the difficulty in assuring its success, change leaders are central to planning and executing transformational change (Higgs & Rowland, 2011). The next section reviews theory and literature about change leaders in detail.

## **Leading Change**

During transformational change, when by definition the outcome is not necessarily discernable when looking out from the starting point, there aren't any roadmaps to follow when leading change. Successfully navigating and executing transformational change often requires breakthrough behaviors from leaders and employees (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Kezar, 2013) and there is a need to help those involved in the change to make sense of what is happening both within and outside the organization (Kezar, 2013). Therefore, it is imperative that leaders of transformational change remain steady during all of the uncertainty and ambiguity that accompanies this type of change.

**Definition of change leadership.** It has been suggested that there are four dimensions to leadership: (a) setting a purpose that inspires people to willingly work towards it; (b) paying attention to how to achieve that purpose (means, pace, quality); (c) forming and keeping group unity during the process; and (d) focusing on sustained effectiveness at the individual level (Scouller, 2011). Extrapolating from these leadership dimensions, a change leader is someone who develops, articulates and gains commitment for the strategies that are needed to bring about a desired change (Gill, 2003). According to Miller (2002), there are two key characteristics of successful change leaders. The first is their personal ability to be comfortable with and to adapt during change. The second comes from their beliefs about how to successfully drive organizational change.

Change leadership is about crafting a future-looking vision, employing the strategies to make it a reality and making sure that the entire organization is directing its energy toward making it happen (Gill, 2003; Higgs & Rowland, 2011). Visioning is the act of creating this future and is defined as "a mental process in which images of the

desired future (goals, objectives, outcomes) are made intensely real and compelling to act as motivators for the present action” (Jack, Boyatzis, Khawaja, Passarelli, & Leckie, 2013, pp. 370–371). For organization members, having a shared and positive vision for a desired future state is both necessary and a source of motivation because it stimulates hope and creates a state of openness and flexibility in organization members (Jack et al., 2013; Waldman, Balthazard, & Peterson, 2011). “Leadership of successful change requires vision, strategy, the development of a culture of sustainable shared values that support the vision and strategy for change, and empowering, motivating and inspiring those who are involved or affected” (Gill, 2003, pp. 307–308). Having an inspiring vision was found to be a key component of a successful transformational change (Caldwell, 2003; Waldman et al., 2011), with change leaders setting the vision for change and change managers executing to bring that vision into reality (Caldwell, 2003).

**Change leaders.** “Chaos, complexity and emergence require a new kind of leader (Hawkins, 2010, p. 25). Given the continually increasing pace of change and the attendant complexity that engenders, along with the increasing frequency of transformational change within organizations, there is a need for companies and leaders to become more agile and for change to be catalyzed and steered (Boudreau & Ziskin, 2011; Joiner & Josephs, 2007; Worley & Mohrman, 2014). According to Joiner and Josephs (2007), “senior executives say that agility is one of the most critical leadership capacities needed in their companies today” (p. 36).

Traditionally, “change leaders are those executives or senior managers at the very top of the organization who envision, initiate or sponsor strategic change of a far-reaching or transformational nature” (Caldwell, 2003, p. 291). In recent years, organizations have shifted from hierarchical authoritarian structures with heroic

leadership to complex, open and interdependent systems that require a more collaborative leadership style (Caldwell, 2003; Crocitto & Youssef, 2003; Joiner & Josephs, 2007).

This new style of leadership involves employees in decision-making and is focused on enabling and empowering well into all levels of the organization (Caldwell, 2003). “In complex, rapidly changing environments, heroic leaders wind up over-controlling and under-utilizing subordinates” (Joiner & Josephs, 2007, p. 39). Going forward, leadership is moving from “hero leadership” to being increasingly shared across the organization as collective leadership, where the “commitment, and wisdom of people at all organizational levels can collaborate across boundaries” and members of the organization “have reinvigorated accountability and authority to act on behalf of customers, employees, and other key constituents” (Boudreau & Ziskin, 2011, p. 258).

As a result, responsibility for implementing change will be shared between leaders and managers within the organization. In this type of leadership scenario, “interpersonal relationships are of utmost importance” (Crocitto & Youssef, 2003, p. 395). Thus networks and networking become a key mechanism for implementing transformational change as the people who have the knowledge and expertise are distributed throughout the organization (Crocitto & Youssef, 2003; Worley & Mohrman, 2014). Worley and Mohrman added:

Only by making change leadership part of everyone’s job can the organization change and learn quickly enough to adapt. Specialized change management roles will shift the planning and management of change to helping organization leaders build change capabilities, providing deep knowledge and guidance . . . and creating connections for sharing and learning. (p. 221)

*Needed knowledge, skills, and abilities.* In the research, a number of necessary qualities and competencies for change leaders have been identified. Table 1 provides a comparison of some of the attributes that have been found to be most important for

successful change leaders according to Caldwell (2003), Higgs and Rowland (2001) and Young and Dulewicz (2006).

**Table 1**

***A Comparison of Some Necessary Attributes for Leading Change***

Caldwell (2003)	Higgs and Rowland (2001)	Young and Dulewicz (2006)
Inspiring vision	Change Initiation (Creating the case for change, securing sponsorship for the change)	Goal oriented (Leader-centric direction setting)
Entrepreneurship	Change Impact (Scoping breadth, depth, sustainability and returns of a change strategy)	Involving (Including others in direction setting and methods of goal attainment, which is less leader-centric)
Integrity and honesty	Change Facilitation (Helping others, through facilitation, to gain insight into the human dynamics of change and develop confidence to achieve the change goals)	Engaging (Helping others to participate in achieving the goals and to assist them in developing their capabilities).
Learning from others	Change Leadership (Influencing and enthusing others through personal advocacy, vision and drive and accessing resources to build a solid platform for change)	
Openness to new ideas	Change Learning (Scanning, reflecting and identifying learning opportunities and ensuring insights are captured and utilized at the individual, group and organizational levels)	
Risk-taking	Change Execution (Formulating and guiding the implementation of a change plan with appropriate goals, resources, metrics and review mechanisms)	
Adaptability and flexibility	Change Presence (High personal commitment to achieve the goals of a change initiative through integrity and courage, while maintaining objectivity and individual resilience)	
Creativity	Change Technology (Knowledge, generation and skillful appreciation of change theories, tools and processes)	
Experimentation		
Using power		

*Note.* Based on “Change Leaders and Change Managers: Different or Complementary?” by R. Caldwell, 2003, *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 24(5), p. 288. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/01437730310485806>; “Developing Change Leaders: Assessing the Impact of a Development Programme,” by M. Higgs and D. Rowland, 2001, *Journal of Change Management*, 2(1), p. 48; “Leadership Styles, Change Context and Leader Performance in the Royal Navy,” by M. Young and V. Dulewicz, 2006, *Journal of Change Management*, 6(4), p. 384. doi:[10.1080/14697010601081860](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14697010601081860)

In the construct of agile, collective, or “post-heroic” leadership during times of ambiguity and turbulence, the most successful leaders demonstrate four types of leadership competencies specifically oriented around agility (Joiner & Josephs, 2007, p. 39). Useful in leading transformational change, these include (a) context-setting agility (e.g., scope, desired outcomes, long-term trends); (b) stakeholder agility (identifying, assessing and engaging key stakeholders); (c) creative agility (appreciating what is new in situations that appear very familiar); and (d) self-leadership agility (e.g., enhanced self-awareness).

All of these qualities and competencies for change leaders are variations on a theme. What may be most important to successful change leadership is situational awareness, in which the particular leadership style or attribute is adapted to the situation or context (Young & Dulewicz, 2006).

*Activities of transformational change leaders.* In transformational organizational change, not only does the organization need to change but the people in the organization, both leaders and employees, need to personally change as well. “In today’s business environment, significant transformation cannot happen without the simultaneous transformation of a critical mass of leaders’ and employees’ mindsets and behavior and the organization’s culture” (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 49).

Because transformational change involves leading people toward an uncertain future, change leaders need a great deal of personal strength, discipline and vulnerability to be successful. Given that it has been shown that uncertainty causes people to (wrongly) predict that something bad is about to happen (Sarinopoulos et al., 2010), leaders of change must be willing to manage their own feelings of vulnerability in order to help organization members deal with the vulnerability that they are feeling and at the same

time accept that they “cannot control the process or outcome for which they feel so responsible” (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 72). Being able to inspire others has been shown to be absolutely necessary in order to create confidence, trust and intrinsic motivation among followers and contributes to performance at all levels, including individual, group/team, and across the entire organization (Waldman et al., 2011).

Leadership behaviors that can be described as “facilitating and engaging” are more likely to lead to a successful transformational change (Higgs & Rowland, 2011, p. 309). The Leadership Dimensions Questionnaire (LDQ), a self-assessment tool, can be used to measure performance of a leader according to 15 LDQ dimensions (Dulewicz & Higgs, 2005; Young & Dulewicz, 2006). Looking at the leader behaviors that are covered by the LDQ assessment against a variety of change contexts, Dulewicz and Higgs (2005) have determined that there are three types of leadership styles: (a) engaging leadership, which is “focused on producing radical change with high levels of engagement and commitment” (p. 114); (b) involving leadership, which is most useful for transitional change; and (c) goal leadership, which is a leadership style that is most suitable for organizations that are operating in a relatively stable context in order to deliver very specific and clearly understood results—precisely the opposite of the conditions that would be experienced during a transformational organizational change. Each of these leadership styles has a profile within the LDQ. The LDQ profile for the engaging leadership style, the style best suited for transformational organizational change, is represented in Table 2.

Table 2

*Leadership Dimensions Questionnaire Profile for the Engaging Leadership Style*

Leadership Dimensions Questionnaire Dimension	Low	Medium	High
Critical analysis and judgment		X	
Vision and imagination		X	
Strategic perspective		X	
Engaging communication			X
Managing resources	X		
Empowering			X
Developing			X
Achieving		X	
Self-awareness			X
Emotional resilience			X
Motivation			X
Interpersonal sensitivity			X
Influencing			X
Intuitiveness			X
Conscientiousness			X

*Note.* “Leadership Styles, Change Context and Leader Performance in the Royal Navy,” by M. Young and V. Dulewicz, 2006, *Journal of Change Management*, 6(4), p. 384. doi:10.1080/14697010601081860

Empowerment, which can be defined as “giving people power” (Gill, 2003, p. 315) is an important activity for change leaders to energize and enable a transformational change. “Empowerment is giving people the knowledge, skills, opportunity, freedom, self-confidence and resources to manage themselves and be accountable” (p. 315). Empowerment is about engaging the organization’s members to become involved in the change process and to bring all of their creativity and intellectual power to the task. “People are much more inclined to support what they help to create (and they resist what is forced on them)” (p. 316).

Neurologically speaking, when introducing a high degree of change into an organization, there must be an equivalent degree of change in the mental maps of change participants (Rock & Schwartz, 2007). A change leader can facilitate change within an organization by cultivating insight among organizational constituents, which helps to



reduce the natural resistance of the brain to change and helps employees to own the change that is being introduced into the organization.

A key task for transformational change leaders is to create alignment with the envisioned future so that when the going gets tough, the organization and its members stay committed to the ultimate goal (Kotter, 1995). Alignment is the process of “galvanizing people around the aspirations and objectives of the company” (Gill, 2003, p. 310). The degree to which employee hearts and minds are engaged, and they perceive that they have choice around what the change will be and how it is implemented, will determine the outcome of major change efforts especially during transformational change (Thomas, 2014).

This, then, is the paradox of leading transformational change. In order to successfully complete a transformational organizational change, change leaders must gain the commitment of the organization and build resolve within the organizational community as well as set up discipline and structure to carry the change effort through to a successful conclusion (Miller, 2002). This involves work at the individual employee level, fostering agility, mindset shifts, engagement and inspiration, while at the same time providing just enough structure at just the right time to support what is essentially an emergent new form that comes from the change.

**Leadership during ambiguity.** From an ambiguity point of view, adaptability is essential for a leader to successfully navigate change conditions. Adaptable change leaders exhibit the qualities of optimism, self-assurance, innovation, collaboration, purposefulness, systems-focus and proactivity (Miller, 2002). Given the nature of transformational organizational change, leaders are without the usual reference points and guidelines that exist in less turbulent conditions and must rationalize the ambiguity for

themselves (Cameron, 2008). When leadership is effective, especially during transformational organizational change, the leader is able to regulate his or her own emotions and be positive about the intended future state while minimizing their own so-called negative emotions that might discomfit followers (Waldman et al., 2011).

Successful change leaders must utilize self-management skills that help them to remain centered and focused. This balance is representative of the leader's emotional intelligence (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). Interestingly, neuroscience has shown that leaders with dominant right hemispheres are most likely to exhibit this sort of emotional intelligence and to be more effective at the interpersonal communication and social relationships necessary during transformational organizational change (Boyatzis et al., 2012; Waldman et al., 2011). The ultimate result and success of the transformation is directly tied to the leader's ability to engage in their own personal introspection and change (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010).

Besides handling their own reactions to turbulence, change leaders must also help their organizations and employees through a transformational organizational change process and its attendant ambiguity. There are three ways in which successful change leaders do this (Higgs & Rowland, 2011): First, they are self-aware and consciously use their presence during the change process. Second, they stay in the moment, being very attentive to everything that is occurring and working with their teams as situations arise. Third, they stay aligned with the strategic vision for the change and ensure that teams make their plans accordingly. These are all other-focused behaviors, as opposed to leader-centric behaviors, which have been found to contribute to successful change efforts.

Successful change leaders also help their organizations to deal with ambiguity by framing change, which is “establishing starting points for change, designing and managing the journey” and creating capacity, which means “creating individual and organizational capabilities and communication and making connections” (Higgs & Rowland, 2011, p. 312). These activities, which help organization members understand the context for the change among other things, give them guidelines for staying on course and assists them in dealing with ambiguity that is associated with a transformational organizational change. Mindfulness offers a potentially powerful way to manage ambiguity and promote positive outcomes and will be examined in more detail in the next section.

### **Mindfulness**

Many contemplative traditions have been utilized for centuries as a way for people to improve “the quality of consciousness for the maintenance and enhancement of well-being” (Wilber, 2000, as cited in Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 822) and to cultivate the “faculty of self-awareness” (Dhiman, 2009, p. 56). Mindfulness is a “universal human capacity” (p. 55), which entails cultivating attention and awareness in the present moment (Dhiman, 2009). Another way to say this is that mindfulness teaches three basic skills: “focus, awareness and living in the moment” (Sethi, 2009, p. 7).

“Mindfulness is both a process (mindfulness practice) and an outcome (mindful awareness)” (Barbezat & Bush, 2013, p. 95). Mindfulness has also been described both as a trait and as a state (Grossman & Van Dam, 2011). As a trait, mindfulness has an innate quality that causes it to endure over time, which can also be described as an enhanced awareness of the present moment. Mindfulness as a trait is usually cultivated through mindfulness meditation, although there are other ways to strengthen trait mindfulness.

State mindfulness has a transitory quality similar to emotions that change capriciously from moment to moment. Brown and Ryan (2003) describe the difference between mindfulness as a trait and as a state this way: “A trait effect relates stable individual differences to average levels of an outcome across days. State effects identify systematic fluctuations above and below (that is, controlling for) each person's average level on that variable” (p. 836). A key point of note is that any given individual will experience both trait and state mindfulness. They are not mutually exclusive.

Interest in mindfulness has accelerated over the past 20 to 30 years, evidenced by the work of Dhiman (2009), Hart, Ivztan, and Hart (2013) as well as other studies which together have resulted in mindfulness becoming accepted as a way to reduce stress and create positive outcomes (Heard, 2010; Kabat-Zinn, 2013). By 2005 there were upwards of one hundred scientific papers on mindfulness, a number which increased to more than 1,500 by 2013 (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). These studies have shown that mindfulness has many effects on the human body and mind, including “our genes and chromosomes, on our cells and tissues, on specialized regions of our brain and the neural networks that link those regions, as well as on our thoughts and emotions and our social networks” (p. xxxiv).

There are two prevailing views of mindfulness. One is Eastern and primarily derived from Buddhism (Dhiman, 2009). Mindfulness was developed as a sacred practice in religious and spiritual orientations (Hall, 2013). While other traditions such as Hindu, Sufi and Christianity have practices that might be said to induce mindfulness, it is core to the teachings in the Buddhist tradition (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Dhiman, 2009). In Buddhism there are two main types of meditation, samatha meditation (to develop calmness and a serene nature) and vipassana or insight meditation (Dhiman, 2009; Han &

Zhang, 2011; Hart et al., 2013; Heard, 2010). The latter, insight meditation, forms the core of what is most often used today in the cultivation of the Eastern practice of mindfulness.

The state of mindfulness is about being versus doing (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; McMahon & Collard, 2009). At its heart, mindfulness is also a way of paying attention (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Gardner & Moore, 2007; Kabat-Zinn, 1994). In the literature, mindfulness is almost universally described as being focused on reality (Barbezat & Bush, 2013) in the present moment in a state of non-judgment (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Gardner & Moore, 2007; Han & Zhang, 2011) with acceptance and acknowledgement of what is (Barbezat & Bush, 2013). This produces a state of increased and ongoing awareness (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Han & Zhang, 2011). When in a mindful state, a person is aware of their internal experience, thoughts, emotions, bodily sensations, processes and states, as well as external stimuli and events (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Gardner & Moore, 2007; Han & Zhang, 2011) and yet is not identified with any of these (Barbezat & Bush, 2013). There is an ability to notice everything that is happening in the moment (Gardner & Moore, 2007) without reacting, either positively or negatively, to what is occurring (Han & Zhang, 2011). This means that we stop reacting out of our habitual patterns and reactions and instead see what is occurring as it really is, in that moment (Barbezat & Bush, 2013).

Although there are many modern teachers of mindfulness, including Nyanaponika Thera, Thich Nhat Hanh, Ellen Langer, Joseph Goldstein and Jack Kornfield (Dhiman, 2009), it is Jon Kabat-Zinn who ignited the current level of popularity of mindfulness through the development of MBSR, or Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction, (Gieseke, 2014) at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center in 1979 (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

Mindfulness from Kabat-Zinn's point of view is considered to be "paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment and nonjudgmentally" (Kabat-Zinn, 1994, p. 4). Kabat-Zinn has suggested that there are seven attitudinal foundations for mindfulness practice, which are non-judging, patience, beginner's mind, trust, non-striving, acceptance and letting go (Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

The other view of mindfulness is Western and was developed primarily through the work of Ellen Langer, a psychologist who looked at mindfulness through a cognitive lens (Heard, 2010). Langer defined mindfulness as "a flexible state of mind in which we are actively engaged in the present, noticing new things and sensitive to context" (Han & Zhang, 2011, p. 3). According to Langer, there are three characteristics that indicate that someone is taking a mindful approach (Gärtner, 2011). These include "the continuous creation of new categories, openness to new information, and an implicit awareness of more than one perspective" (p. 255). Another way of describing Langer's style of mindfulness is to say that a mindful person is active and interested in life (Heard, 2010) and in a state of flow or, as Langer called it, *mindful creativity* (Hart et al., 2013). Langer also described a state of *mindlessness*, in which a person can be said to be operating on automatic pilot (as cited in Gärtner, 2011) and relying on old patterns and/or categories that are evaluated as good or bad (Heard, 2010). *Automatic pilot*, in Langer's construct, has also been described as "behavior characterized by overlearned and, thus, automatic reaction tendencies" (Sauer & Kohls, 2011, p. 293).

What is interesting about these two approaches to mindfulness is that they have been operating for almost 30 years in a sort of parallel universe, with very little crossover between the two (Hart et al., 2013). Langer's approach to mindfulness is primarily as a mental mode that uses brief interventions intended to improve a person's awareness of

external stimuli and is directed toward the development of creativity and a short-term mindful state. Kabat-Zinn's (2013) approach encompasses the Buddhist practice of attending to both internal and external stimuli as well as to one's own thought processes. These two areas of focus (internal and external) introduce the additional elements of introspection and metacognitive awareness that enhance mindfulness (Hart et al., 2013). Dreyfus, a Buddhist scholar at Williams College, has described mindfulness like this:

Mindfulness is a way of being in which one is highly aware (of what is inside yourself and outside yourself in the environment) and focused on the reality of the present moment, accepting and acknowledging it without getting caught up in thoughts about the situation or emotional reactions to the situation. It is a capability we can all cultivate. Mindful awareness allows us to observe our mental states without over-identifying with them, creating an attitude of acceptance that can lead to greater curiosity and better self-understanding. (Barbezat & Bush, 2013, pp. 95–96)

This study will use the construct of mindfulness as developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in his Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) program (Siegel, 2007). Grounded in Buddhist traditions, it is still a more Western view than traditional Eastern mindfulness definitions and practices. As well, the study will examine mindfulness as a trait, as cultivated and developed by mindfulness meditation (as opposed to Langer's brief mindful interventions), because trait mindfulness is better related to the mindful leadership that is the focus of this study.

**Mindfulness outcomes.** At its most basic level, mindfulness is a way to avoid responding to what is happening in habitual and automatic ways (Sauer & Kohls, 2011). From a neurological perspective, mindfulness involves the use of the brain's "C-system" which is utilized in consciously controlled mental processes as opposed to the *X-system* that is used for reflexes and other automatic processes.

As a practice, mindfulness is a skill that can develop and grow stronger by repetition (Kabat-Zinn, 2013). Mindfulness practices most often consist of meditation but can also include yoga, mindful walking and others. Awareness is the “background ‘radar’ of consciousness” (Brown & Ryan, 2003, p. 823) that continually monitors a person’s internal and external environments (Brown & Ryan, 2003). Attention is a “process of focusing conscious, sustained awareness” (Roche et al., 2014, p. 477) that results in an increased sensitivity to environmental influences. The point of discussing awareness and attention is that they are both part of the normal repertoire of functioning for human beings, however in the case of a more mindful individual these capabilities are enhanced such that the person experiences their current reality just as it is, without evaluating or judging it as either good or bad, more often than a less mindful person would.

**Practicing mindfulness.** While some individuals have a naturally high capacity for mindfulness (trait mindfulness), most people need to actively cultivate the state of mindfulness through regular practice in order to improve their level of mindfulness (Hülshager et al., 2013). The process of developing mindfulness involves the use of mindfulness practices such as mindfulness meditation, preferably daily, to consciously monitor and regulate awareness and to manage one’s own attention (Hart et al., 2013; Sethi, 2009). It does not take long periods of practice to experience the benefits of increasing mindfulness (McMahon & Collard, 2009; Sethi, 2009; Siegel, 2009) but it “has to be done regularly and the benefits accrue over time” (Sethi, 2009, p. 9).

There are a number of practices that have been shown to enhance mindfulness, including yoga, tai chi, qigong, centering prayer, mindfully doing the dishes, mindful walking, sitting or listening, reflective journaling, loving kindness, body scans or engaging in mindfulness meditation (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Han & Zhang, 2011;



Siegel, 2009). Boyatzis and McKee suggest that there are three ways for an individual to increase mindfulness, which are reflection, meditation and by having relationships that are supportive and fulfilling (Boyatzis & McKee, 2005).

Focusing on the breath in meditation is the most fundamental mindfulness practice (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Dhiman, 2009; Siegel, 2009). Using the breath to cultivate a state of mindfulness is an integrative process because:

The breath is an interface between the internal and the external. It is at the boundary between the involuntary and the voluntary, the automatic and the effortful. The breath is also rhythmic, and rhythm is important in the way the nervous system functions. (Siegel, 2009, p. 149)

Whatever technique is used, the objective is to focus on staying present and intentionally create an integrated state of mindful awareness through the mindfulness activity of choice. Over time and with continued practice, states of mindful awareness that might initially take effort to achieve will become easier to sustain and become an established aspect of the individual (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Kabat-Zinn, 2013).

**Outcomes of mindfulness.** Brown and Ryan (2003) explained:

Mindfulness captures a quality of consciousness that is characterized by clarity and vividness of current experience and functioning and thus stands in contrast to the mindless, “less awake” states of habitual or automatic functioning that may be chronic for many individuals. (p. 824)

Mindfulness research has studied and found positive outcomes in physical (Davidson et al., 2003; Heard, 2010; Sauer & Kohls, 2011; Sethi, 2009; Siegel, 2007, 2009), emotional (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Hall, 2013; Hart et al., 2013; Heard, 2010; Roche et al., 2014; Sauer & Kohls, 2011; Siegel, 2007), and professional domains of life (Dhiman, 2009; Gärtner, 2013; Gieseke, 2014; Gondo et al., 2013; Heard, 2010; Hülshager et al., 2013; Roche et al., 2014; Santorelli, 2011; Sauer & Kohls, 2011; Sethi, 2009) (see Table 3). All

of these outcomes together help enhance the individual's emotional balance, patience, wisdom, non-reactivity (Siegel, 2007), and response flexibility (Siegel, 2009).

**Table 3**

***The Benefits of Mindfulness***

Category	Benefits		Studies
Physical	Physical health. Relief from chronic pain. Enhanced brain function and structure. Neuroplasticity. Reduced cognitive decline. Reduced blood pressure.	Improved body regulation. Strengthened working memory. Stronger immune parameters. Improved quality of sleep. Slower heart and respiratory rates.	Davidson et al. (2003), Heard (2010), Sauer and Kohls (2011), Sethi (2009), Siegel (2007, 2009)
Emotional	Happiness. Emotional intelligence. Insight. Intuition. Relationship satisfaction. Clarity of emotional states. Enhanced mood repair. Relaxation. Mental health. Positive emotions. Satisfaction with life. Well-being. Vitality.	Sense of autonomy. Optimism. Self-regulation. Stress reduction. Reduced anxiety. Reduced depression due to increased levels of serotonin. Diminished neuroticism. Reduced fear. Reduced substance abuse. Reduction in rumination (absorbed in past, future anxiety).	Brown and Ryan (2003), Hall (2013), Hart et al. (2013), Heard (2010), Roche et al. (2014), Sauer and Kohls (2011), Siegel (2007)
Work	Self-discipline. Power. Concentration. Will. Employee work engagement. Emotional intelligence. Motivation. Creativity and clear thinking. Responsibility.	Patience. Endurance and diminished emotional exhaustion. Job satisfaction. Improved readiness for change. Perseverance. Reduced turnover and burnout. Sense of duty. Leadership.	Dhiman (2009), Gärtner (2013), Gieseke (2014), Gondo et al. (2013), Heard (2010), Hülshager et al. (2013), Roche et al. (2014), Santorelli (2011), Sauer and Kohls (2011), Sethi (2009)

Siegel (2009) explained that with consistent practice of mindful awareness, a person would be likely to develop certain mindfulness traits that eventually occur naturally within the individual, such as acting with awareness by attuning to one's sensory experience and being less reactive due to enhanced emotional self-regulation. Another outcome of repeated mindfulness practice is development of the self-as-observer. It follows that, although feelings and thoughts will arise and subside, the

individual will no longer be hostage to them, blindly carrying out their dictates. A further mindfulness trait that develops through practice is the capacity to articulate the internal workings of one's nonlinear mind—the right hemisphere, whose contents exist in rich images and often defy expression.

Moreover, “direct application of mindfulness skills teaches people how to become more reflective” (Siegel, 2007, p. 15). As people turn inward, they become more attuned to themselves and develop greater self-understanding, leading to attuned communication with others (Dhiman, 2009; Siegel, 2009). They gain an internal sense of belonging (Siegel, 2009), an inner sense of well-being (Siegel, 2007), increased empathy towards others (Dhiman, 2009; Siegel, 2009), and more enjoyment of life (Rock, 2009). Kindness and love also make them feel good, thus further enhancing their sense of well-being (Dhiman, 2009; Siegel, 2007). The net result is that people can experience life more fully, rather than simply operating as dictated by their schemas on automatic pilot (Siegel, 2009).

**Applications and uses within organizations.** While there have been some studies that have looked at the role of mindfulness in the workplace, there is still a relative lack of empirical evidence on the benefits of mindfulness for members of organizations (Dhiman, 2009; Hülshager et al., 2013; Roche et al., 2014).

Employees who are not operating in a mindful state of awareness tend to act without thinking, don't notice when new information is available and aren't aware of or open to looking at alternate ways of accomplishing a certain task (Han & Zhang, 2011). Many are not present and emotionally available because they are paying attention to the past or to the future, which affects their performance in the here and now (McMahon & Collard, 2009). Generally speaking, mindfulness is difficult in corporate environments

due to rampant multitasking, too much information coming at employees, and “the fragmentation of attention, and the busyness and speed of everyday life” (Barbezat & Bush, 2013, p. 104). Barbezat and Bush added, “Peter Drucker recognized that although knowledge workers use their minds to make a living, they are rarely taught to use their minds more effectively” (p. 103).

“Becoming more mindful means connecting with the experience of ‘being’ rather than ‘doing’, increasing effectiveness and personal productivity” (McMahon & Collard, 2009, p. 65). As stated earlier, mindfulness develops the qualities of attention and focus and improves emotional intelligence, all of which are key in today’s business environments (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Dhiman, 2009). Mindfulness can improve creativity in approaches to solving business problems, induce flexibility of response, produce better and more accurate decisions, help reduce accidents, reduce the tendency to react in ways that are repetitious or not well thought out and produce resilience in the organization itself (Han & Zhang, 2011). With the awareness that comes from mindfulness, employees can step back and consider alternatives rather than reacting impulsively. This is because when a person is mindful they have the capacity to observe stressful events without evaluating or attaching meaning to an event and therefore not judging it or reacting precipitously (Hülshager et al., 2013).

Mindful employees are more productive and calmer. McMahon and Collard (2009) explained:

Different parts of the nervous system are activated when we are consciously focused on the present. This enables people to experience a greater sense of calm and control, which in turn minimizes the risk of unwanted stress while aiding clearer thinking. This leads to improved decision-making and an increased satisfaction with life. Rumination triggers the so-called ‘stress response’, which has a number of debilitating physical, emotional, psychological and behavioral aspects. . . . Mindfulness-based interventions can significantly improve the quality

of well-being at all levels and individuals can improve their sense of satisfaction by including mindful awareness training into their daily life. From a corporate perspective, this leads to more effective and productive behaviors at work. (p. 65)

**Measuring mindfulness.** Over the past number of years, as mindfulness has been increasingly studied and found to have a wide range of benefits, there have been a number of attempts to design and validate survey instruments to measure mindfulness in research subjects (Baer, 2011, 2015; Bergomi, Tschacher, & Kupper, 2013; Block-Lerner, Salters-Pedneault, & Tull, 2005; Brown & Ryan, 2003; Gieseke, 2014; Sauer et al., 2013). This has been an evolution focused on bringing an internal and very personal state that is generally associated with spirituality or religion under scientific investigation (Block-Lerner et al., 2005). One of the challenges that has been encountered in measuring mindfulness has been the fact that there are multiple and nuanced definitions of the term “mindfulness” (Baer, 2011, 2015; Baer, Smith, Hopkins, Krietemeyer, & Toney, 2006; Baer, Walsh, & Lykins, 2009; Belzer et al., 2013; Block-Lerner et al., 2005; Sauer et al., 2013). While most definitions of mindfulness have the concepts of attention, awareness and present-moment focus in common, there are subtle differences represented depending on who developed the definition, what sort of focus (Western versus Eastern) they advocate and whether they consider mindfulness to be of a singular nature versus consisting of multidimensional skills or facets (Baer, 2015; Baer et al., 2006, 2009; Block-Lerner et al., 2005; Sauer et al., 2013). A recent study by Bergomi et al. (2013) determined that the mindfulness instruments in current use focus on nine aspects of mindfulness, which are:

- (a) observing, attending to experiences; (b) acting with awareness; (c) non-judgment, acceptance of experiences; (d) self-acceptance; (e) willingness and readiness to expose oneself to experiences, non-avoidance; (f) non-reactivity to experience; (g) non-identification with own experiences; (h) insightful understanding; and (i) labeling, describing. (p. 192)

Reducing this down, it appears that mindfulness is believed by most researchers to consist of two main factors: presence, which is paying attention to what is happening in the present moment, and acceptance, which is an attitude of openness and acceptance of what is (Sauer et al., 2013).

There are a number of mindfulness assessments that are represented in the literature (Baer, 2011; Baer et al., 2006, 2009; Bergomi et al., 2013; Block-Lerner et al., 2005; Sauer et al., 2013). Sauer et al. found eleven of these based on their comprehensive review of mindfulness instruments (see Table 4).

Most of these instruments have been found through research to be useful assessments of mindfulness and have also been shown to be valid through correlation (meaning that the results from each have been found to be significantly correlated with each other and with the psychological characteristics that should represent mindfulness) (Baer, 2011, p. 251; Bergomi et al., 2013; Sauer et al., 2013). Each of the different mindfulness instruments represent an attempt to develop a self-report instrument that will capture the essence of what it means for an individual to be mindful (Baer et al., 2006; Belzer et al., 2013; Sauer et al., 2013) and all of them have a variety of strengths and weaknesses (Baer et al., 2009). Most of the mindfulness instruments in use today are of the self-report type because it is difficult for an outside observer to determine to what degree a person is mindful and there aren't any reliable physiological functions that can be measured to determine mindfulness (Baer, 2011; Belzer et al., 2013), although recently "results from brain imaging studies have found a positive relationship between mindfulness and neural functions associated with well-being" (Sauer et al., 2013, p. 4).

Table 4

*Mindfulness Instruments*

Mindfulness Instrument	Measures Trait or State Mindfulness?	Good for “mindfulness naive” or trained person?	Mindfulness factors measured
Cognitive and Affective Mindfulness Scale Revised (CAMS-R)	Trait	Both	Attention. Present focus. Awareness. Acceptance.
Developmental Mindfulness Survey (DMS)	Trait	Both	Open awareness of the present. Non-judgmental stance.
Effects of Meditation Scale (EOM)	Trait	Trained meditators	Mindfulness in the context of meditation and meditative experiences. Specific effects of meditative practice.
Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ)	Trait	Both	Similar to KIMS with one added factor: Observe Describe Act with awareness Nonreactive stance Nonjudging of experience (the added factor over KIMS)
Freiburg Mindfulness Inventory (FMI)	Trait	Both	Present moment aspect. Non-judgmental attitude.
Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skills (KIMS)	Trait	Both	Observe. Describe. Act with awareness. Nonreactive stance.
Mindfulness Attention Awareness Scale (MAAS)	Trait	Both	Mindlessness (absence of mindfulness)
Langer Mindfulness/Mindlessness Scale (MMS)	Trait	Not tested on experienced meditators yet	Information processing and creativity theory.
Philadelphia Mindfulness Scale (PHLMS)	Trait	Not tested on experienced meditators yet	Awareness. Acceptance.
Southampton Mindfulness Scale (SMQ)	Trait	Both	Present moment awareness. Accepting attitude towards all experience.
Toronto Mindfulness Scale (TMS)	State	Both	Mindfulness in a given situation.

*Note.* Based on “Assessment of Mindfulness: Review on State of the Art,” by S. Sauer, H. Walach, S. Schmidt, T. Hinterberger, S. Lynch, A. Bussing, and N. Kohls, 2013, *Mindfulness*, 4(1), p. 3.  
doi:10.1007/s12671-012-0122-5

There are some advantages to self-report questionnaires in that they are convenient, efficient, and for the most part reliable for measuring the aspects of mindfulness that they were designed to determine (Baer, 2011; Sauer et al., 2013). The disadvantages of self-report mindfulness instruments are similar to those for all self-report questionnaires (Baer, 2011). There can be biases when respondents don't rate their degree of mindfulness accurately, which may be consciously or unconsciously done, or when they don't understand the terminology used to describe mindfulness and mindful conditions (Baer, 2011; Belzer et al., 2013; Sauer et al., 2013). Also, there is something called *shifting baseline* or *response shift* that occurs as internal reference standards change over time as the result of some sort of intervention (Sauer et al., 2013). To use an example that relates to mindfulness, this might occur when someone practices mindfulness meditation. With more practice, a meditator may realize just how far he or she has to go before being truly mindful whereas a novice meditation practitioner might rate him or herself as proficient when in fact they are less so when compared with the seasoned meditator. Regardless of the mindfulness instrument that is used, the general objective is to measure a person's "tendency to be mindful in daily life" (Baer, 2011, p. 245).

The majority of the instruments attempt to measure mindfulness as a trait, with one of them measuring mindfulness as a state (Sauer et al., 2013). Some are designed for use with people who have no previous experience with mindfulness meditation and others are specifically intended to be given to experienced meditators (Baer, 2011, 2015; Bergomi et al., 2013). Often these instruments have been validated with practitioners or teachers of meditation so that they truly are representative of what mindfulness means in daily life (Baer, 2011, 2015).



**Mindful leadership.** Mindfulness for leaders is considered to be “an open state of mind where the leader’s attention, informed by a sensitive awareness, merely observes what is taking place: worry about the future and negative ruminations or projections are brought back to the present moment where the situation is seen for what it is” (Roche et al., 2014, p. 477). Another way to say this is that mindfulness is about looking at things with fresh eyes, as if for the first time (Sauer & Kohls, 2011). It is thought that leaders taking this type of perspective may be better prepared to practice “creative out-of-the-box thinking” (Sauer & Kohls, 2011, p. 297). By practicing mindfulness, a leader is better able to view the overarching “big picture” as well as being able to focus his or her attention in a selective manner (Dhiman, 2009, p. 73). A mindful leader is able to be present for his subordinates with an attitude of acceptance. This means not reacting to a situation even if there are negative aspects to that situation while also showing receptivity and empathy (Sauer & Kohls, 2011). Another way to say this is that mindful leaders systematically develop “emotional resilience” as a way to cope and respond (or not) to both positive and negative events in a way that is open and non-judging (Sauer & Kohls, 2011, p. 302). “Mindfulness combines equanimity toward the ups and downs of life with a receptive sharpness of mind. This is why the concept may be of value for leadership” (Sauer & Kohls, 2011, p. 303).

Boyatzis and McKee (2005) have articulated a type of leadership they call resonant (as opposed to dissonant). Mindfulness is one of three characteristics that determine a resonant leader. They define a mindful leader as awake, aware, and attentive. In his book *The Mindful Leader*, Carroll (2011) suggests that the “primary act of mindful leadership, then, is to open—to fully appreciate our circumstances before we seek to influence or act upon them” (p. 23). Carroll calls out 10 leadership talents that can be

developed through mindfulness: simplicity, poise, respect, courage, confidence, enthusiasm, patience, awareness, skillfulness, and humility. Santorelli (2011) identifies some ways that mindfulness meditation enhances leadership: increased compassion, a keener appreciation for the struggles of oneself and one's colleagues, surrendering to reality just as it is, consideration of multiple viewpoints which enhances relationships, and the ability to be more comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity without feeling the need to act prematurely.

Although there are very few studies that have focused on the subject of leadership and mindfulness, recent research shows that stressed leaders lack the capacity to support their teams, which has a concomitant effect on the stress levels of their employees (Roche et al., 2014; Sauer & Kohls, 2011). In the research that does exist, mindfulness has been shown to be a valuable source of well-being for employees but it has not yet been studied extensively for its ability to improve the mental states of leaders (Roche et al., 2014). Roche et al. did find that mindfulness has a positive effect on a leader's well-being and stress reduction. Mindful leaders have a greater capacity for seeing the big picture and focusing attention in a selective manner and have better listening skills (Dhiman, 2009). They are able to respond instead of react because they are able to observe their thoughts in a way that is disciplined and efficient.

Mindfulness for leaders is increasingly seen as critical to effective leadership and, anecdotally, many successful leaders are now acknowledging the key role that mindfulness has played in all areas of their life, including personal and professional (Dhiman, 2009). "Mindfulness at work is a key leadership competency, and leaders now more than ever need to live and lead mindfully, coach others to be mindful, and create a mindful organization" (Sethi, 2009, p. 7). Mindfulness can improve leadership

competency in the areas of listening, self-awareness, openness to new ideas and multiple perspectives, authenticity, seeing people and situations exactly as they are, and retaining present-moment focus under all circumstances.

**Applications of mindfulness for dealing with ambiguity and organizational change.** Mindfulness is helpful for individuals who are facing ambiguity and change, both at the front-line and managerial levels (Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Gardner & Moore, 2007; Han & Zhang, 2011). “The purpose of mindfulness . . . is to increase cognitive and behavioral control, thereby facilitating people’s capacity to tolerate uncertainty, to be less reactive and more flexible, and to experience a more meaningful engagement with their environments” (Hart et al., 2013, p. 454).

According to Gondo et al. (2013), in creating readiness for change it is important that those involved with the change are aware of implicitly held beliefs in order for the change to be successful. They have suggested that mindfulness is necessary to do this, through “focusing attention on the present, rather than on conceptual categories” (p. 40). By remaining mindful, those involved in the change will be able to detect “routinized behaviors” (p. 40) that would otherwise inhibit the change. Gondo et al. have shown that the three strategies commonly employed during organizational change events (i.e., detailed plans for the implementation of the change, clearly defined goals, and systems to monitor and incentivize progress) may actually serve to *reduce* the level of organizational mindfulness by encouraging members of the organization to focus on these instead of what is actually going on in the moment.

Whereas mindlessness “can directly lead to human error in complex situations” (Han & Zhang, 2011, p. 8), mindfulness can help employees better deal with ambiguity and rapidly changing organizational conditions by reducing stress, promoting inquiry as a

way to reduce and/or eliminate discomfort and by toning down the emotional reactions that are induced by change (Barbezat & Bush, 2013). Mindfulness can also help employees respond positively to organizational change by lessening attempts to control thoughts and emotions, thus reducing worry and anxiety, and by interrupting the automatic behaviors and responses that an individual normally exhibits when experiencing certain emotions. This allows the individual to respond to what is actually occurring in the moment rather than out of some habitual behaviors that might lead to mistakes in judgment (Gardner & Moore, 2007). Mindfulness may also reduce or even eliminate the inner critic, which helps the individual to stay focused on the present moment and leads them to take the right actions while reducing and/or eliminating thoughts that are unrelated to what is needed in the here-and-now.

Mindfulness has been shown to produce a positive impact on emotional intelligence (Han & Zhang, 2011). It can enhance positive traits and give individual employees more tools to deal with organizational change and ambiguity by “tapping the intuitive creative functions of the right brain” (Barbezat & Bush, 2013, p. 102), cultivating metacognitive awareness, which means the person becomes aware of how and where they focus their attention (Gardner & Moore, 2007), “seeing their own thoughts simply as thought and not absolute realities to which they must respond” (p. 37), and “enhancing their sensitivity to cues and contingencies in the environment” (p. 37) which gives them the ability to shift their focus as needed.

### **Summary**

In today’s business world, dynamic changes caused by rapidly shifting environmental conditions are causing greater need for organizations to undergo transformational organizational change and with greater frequency (Callan, 1993;

Cameron, 2008; Gioia et al., 2012; Puleo, 2011; Roche et al., 2014; Sethi, 2009). By definition, transformational organizational change means that the organization must begin a change process that necessitates large shifts in strategy and structure without necessarily having a clearly defined picture of what the outcome will be (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Gioia et al., 2012; Nadler & Tushman, 1990; Nadler et al., 1994; Puleo, 2011). In transformational organizational change, the organization must find its way to the desired end state in a ‘moment by moment’ fashion, which can be a challenging accomplishment for any organization let alone one with hundreds or thousands of employees (Meyer et al., 1990). Besides the changes to strategy and structure already mentioned, transformational organizational change also requires significant shifts in culture and mindset at every level (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010). This level of radical change creates ambiguity, which for both neurological and other reasons is a state that is difficult for most people to deal with, let alone thrive in (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Callan, 1993; Denis et al., 1996; Robinson & Griffiths, 2005; Wright, 2009). Because there is such a high rate of failure for organizational change efforts (and even more so for transformational organizational change), it is necessary for successful change leaders to engage and help the organization to make the shift to its desired end state (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Miller, 2002; Olson, 2008; Puleo, 2011; Wren & Dulewicz, 2005). The qualities of change leaders have been discussed and it is clear that self-awareness and presence are key to their ability to successfully lead transformational organizational change (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Barbezat & Bush, 2013; Caldwell, 2003; Gardner & Moore, 2007; Han & Zhang, 2011; Hart et al., 2013; Higgs & Rowland, 2011; Young & Dulewicz, 2006). Mindfulness has been shown to be helpful in creating self-awareness

and moment-to-moment presence (Brown & Ryan, 2003; Dhiman, 2009; Siegel, 2007, 2009), so the question is: How do experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and does mindfulness help them to do that? As well, how might a leader's mindfulness help others in the organization successfully navigate an organization's transformation? The next chapter will outline the research methods that were used in this study.

## Chapter 3

### Research Methods

The purpose of this study is to examine how experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and to determine whether mindfulness helps them do that. The research questions are:

1. How does ambiguity during transformational organizational change affect participants in that change?
2. What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change?
3. In what ways might mindfulness help experienced change leaders during transformational organizational change?
4. Do change leaders with high levels of mindfulness deal with ambiguity differently than low mindfulness change leaders?

This chapter presents the overall research design, followed by a discussion of the sampling size and selection strategy. Ethical considerations and data collection procedures are also outlined. Finally, the data analysis procedures used for this study are reviewed.

#### Research Design

This study utilized a mixed methods design in which qualitative and quantitative data collection methods are used together in a single study (Maxwell, 2013). A mixed methods research methodology is pragmatic and allows the researcher to have a more complete understanding of the research problem using whichever data collection methods best allow them to investigate each of the components of the research questions (Creswell, 2013).

While the difference between quantitative and qualitative research methods could be described very simply as being related to “words” (qualitative) versus “numbers”

(quantitative), a more complete way of looking at the differences is to examine what research strategies are in use (Creswell, 2013). In quantitative research there is no verbal interaction with subjects, so this method is impersonal and results in gathering a large volume of data at the expense of depth. In qualitative research there is more interaction with participants, therefore the data gathered is more personal and likely to uncover unique nuances from one study participant to another. Qualitative research is also more likely to capture distinctions around context, process, location and the actual experiences of the participants in the study through stories and cases (Punch, 2005). Each research method has its own strengths and suitability for a particular type of data, so the mixed methods design enables the researcher to take advantage of this by using both qualitative and quantitative data appropriately.

There are three purposes for using a mixed methods design. The first of these is *triangulation* (Maxwell, 2013), which enables the researcher to check the results from different research methods against each other. When data from multiple methods all support the same conclusion, there can be increased confidence in those conclusions.

The second purpose for using a mixed methods design is *complementarity* and *expansion* (Maxwell, 2013). By using different methods in a research study, the researcher can more effectively examine various characteristics of the subject under investigation. In this study qualitative interviews, better for exploring topics like mindfulness and change leadership because of the subjective nature of these topics, provided additional and novel insights that weren't preconceived before or during the quantitative section of the study (Sauer et al., 2013).

Finally, a mixed methods research design can produce a more comprehensive analysis and a deeper understanding for subjective topics, like mindfulness, than is



possible with either quantitative or qualitative methods alone (Maxwell, 2013; Sauer et al., 2013). Sauer et al. explained:

Given that mindfulness may be embedded in a complex network of mutual interacting processes, such as motivational patterns, purposes pursued, personality traits, type of interventions maintained, and given that even different types of mindfulness may be extant, we would strongly recommend a mixed-method research. (p. 12)

**Quantitative phase.** The possibilities for quantitative research designs consist of survey research (in which a sample of a population is studied to produce quantitative or numeric data on trends, attitudes or opinions of that population) and experimental research (where a true experiment is conducted, giving a specific treatment to one group and not another, then seeing how the results compare between the two groups) (Creswell, 2013). This study used a self-assessment survey methodology to assess, as best as possible given the study design, to what degree an individual change leader was mindful.

**Qualitative phase.** The research design choices for qualitative studies include narrative research (asking subjects to tell stories about their lives), phenomenological research (describing the shared experiences of several individuals who have experienced some phenomenon), grounded theory (producing a theory of a process, action or interaction by synthesizing the views of multiple participants), ethnography (looking at shared patterns of cultural groups) and case studies (in-depth analysis of a specific event or experience that is bounded in some way, for example by time) (Creswell, 2013). The qualitative research in this study was conducted using a narrative design, where a convenience sample of experienced change leaders was asked a series of questions designed to uncover how they deal with ambiguity in themselves and others during a transformational change event, and whether or not mindfulness was (or was perceived to be) helpful in doing so.

**Sequencing of data collection.** There are two fundamental design options available for sequencing data collection in a mixed methods study, which are *simultaneous* and *sequential*. These may be utilized in a number of ways. For sequentially collected data it is known as an explanatory mixed methods design when quantitative data are collected first, or an exploratory mixed methods design when qualitative data are collected first (Creswell, 2013). In a simultaneous design, also called convergent parallel mixed methods, both quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time. The data from both sources are analyzed separately and the results are compared to see if the findings confirm each other or not. This study used a convergent parallel mixed methods design that:

1. Used purposeful selection via referrals from the researcher's personal network to create a convenience sample of experienced change leaders (N = 19). Specific criteria are detailed below. Using this participant selection methodology allowed the researcher to quickly enroll study subjects who were representative of the above criteria and best able to answer the questions being posed in this research study (Creswell, 2013; Maxwell, 2013).
2. Used a self-assessment survey to measure the degree to which the candidate experienced change leaders were mindful according to the assessment that was used.
3. Used one-on-one interviews with the experienced change leaders to understand whether and how these leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change, both for themselves and others. Participants were also asked questions about the use of mindfulness during transformational organizational change. During the interviews, the experienced change leaders explored the degree to which their mindfulness affected both themselves and their teams.

Because the mixed methods design uses both open-ended and closed-ended questions, using it in this study allowed for both pre-determined and emerging approaches to the research questions as appropriate (Creswell, 2013). The quantitative data, including demographic details, helped to inform how the qualitative data might

enhance the researcher's understanding and thereby shaped how the qualitative data was collected. There was an opportunity to integrate the data as the study progressed, which produced a balanced approach to the research topic.

In this study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and utilized. The quantitative portion was necessary in order to make an attempt at measuring the level of mindfulness of an experienced change leader beyond what the participant might say about him or herself. However, it was not sufficient for the purposes of this study to know that a leader was mindful via a survey. To fully understand whether being mindful helps an experienced change leader successfully carry out a transformational organizational change and whether they use that mindfulness to manage and deal with the ambiguity associated with a transformational change event, the personal stories of these leaders and how their mindfulness does (or doesn't) contribute to dealing with ambiguity during transformational organizational change needed to be gathered. The qualitative data were also needed because how an individual change leader deals with ambiguity, and the strategies they might employ in doing so for themselves and others, is highly personal.

One potential drawback to using a mixed methods approach is that there must be a large enough pool of subjects to ensure validity of the data in the quantitative portion of the study. This was not an issue for this study, because the quantitative research was only used to estimate the level of mindfulness of each participating experienced change leader. On the qualitative side, it was possible for interviewer bias to skew the results, so the researcher made sure to stay clear and open during the inquiry without asking leading questions that might bias the collection and interpretation of the data.

## **Sampling Size and Strategy**

A sample of experienced change leaders was required for this study. In seeking to determine the optimal sample size for a survey, sufficient power and confidence levels must be achieved (Cone & Foster, 2006). The concept of “power”, relative to research design, reflects how likely it is that the researcher can determine what effect the independent variable is having on their research findings. Stated another way, how many participants are needed in order to detect small, medium and large effects of the variable upon the data (Cone & Foster, 2006)? Interview sample sizes for qualitative studies range from 5 to 25 participants depending upon the depth of the interviews (Kvale, 1996).

The sample size for this study was 19 leaders who met the definition for “experienced change leader” that was used for this study. To recap, for this study change leadership included all three of the following characteristics:

1. Holding a senior position in an organization (director or above) or being an external consultant to senior leadership.
2. Playing a leadership role in an organizational change initiative, either as a team leader (with direct reports) and/or as a change leader (individual contributor or a team leader).
3. Carrying out strategic tasks during the change initiative, helping envision and determine the business case for a change initiative, and/or helping engage organization members in executing the change.

A change leader was considered experienced if they had played this type of role in at least one transformational organizational change.

**Selection criteria.** There was a set of selection criteria to insure that there was a sufficient pool of participants with rich and relevant data to share. During the recruitment for this study, when seeking nominations, potential participants and referrers were provided with the following definitions:

1. Change leader: For this study, change leadership includes all three of the following characteristics: (a) holding a senior position in an organization (director or above) or being an external consultant to senior leadership; (b) playing a leadership role in an organizational change initiative, either as a team leader (with direct reports) and/or as a change leader (individual contributor or a team leader); and (c) carrying out strategic tasks during the change initiative, helping envision and determine the business case for a change initiative, and/or helping engage organization members in executing the change. Change leadership encompasses “vision, values, strategy, empowerment, and motivation and inspiration” (Gill, 2003, p. 307).
2. Experienced change leader: For this study, an experienced change leader has played a key role in initiating and implementing at least one strategic transformational change project.
3. Transformational organizational change: Transformational organizational change involves “a radical shift of strategy, structure, systems, processes or technology” (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010, p. 60) where the organization must start working on the change process before the final outcome is fully known and defined (i.e., the final outcome is emergent as a result of the change process). In transformational change, the magnitude and/or breadth of the organizational change is so significant that a shift of culture, behavior and mindset is required to implement the change successfully and sustain it over time; the change is both long-term and organization-wide; and the organization must reorganize and/or significantly change the way it does business (Anderson & Ackerman-Anderson, 2010; Puleo, 2011).

Participants were invited to engage in the interview process after nomination as an experienced change leader according to the definition provided above and following completion of an online questionnaire containing the demographic questions and mindfulness survey being used for this research study.

**Selection procedures.** Participants were recruited using an emailed invitation to participate in the study. The initial pool of possible candidates was determined by purposeful sampling, using the researcher’s network to generate referrals from human resources and organization development professionals and others who were thought to be in the best position to know and refer change leaders who have led at least one transformational change. Those who wished to refer someone were invited to provide the

name and email address of the experienced change leader that they were referring as a possible participant in this study.

This sampling approach to identify candidate experienced change leaders to participate in an interview was relatively efficient. Due to the fact that the genesis of participant selection was related to the researcher's personal network, the selection methodology somewhat limited the range of participants and perhaps introduced bias into the study.

Once contacted, the potential participant received an invitation by email that indicated who referred them, why this research was being conducted, what participation was being requested and the type of participants that were needed. Follow up emails were sent as necessary.

**Selection process.** For nominations of participants for this study, the researcher contacted Pepperdine MSOD alumni and faculty, Organization Development professionals, Human Resources professionals, personal coaches, and experienced change leaders that the researcher personally knew (see Appendix A). Other people who were in a position to know experienced change leaders were also contacted. Potential referrers of experienced change leaders were introduced to the study and given the criteria for selection, then asked to provide names and email contact information of possible participants.

Upon receipt of a nomination from a referrer, an email was sent to the nominee letting them know that someone referred them for this study. The name of the person who referred them was provided to the possible participant. The email message sent to the potential participant introduced the researcher and described the purpose of the study, provided definitions of change leadership and transformational change, outlined the

selection criteria for participation, underscored the voluntary nature of participation, described uses and safeguards regarding the data, and provided an overview of the expectations and activities for those who decided to participate in the study. The invitation email also contained a link to a three-section online survey which was comprised of (a) the consent form with waiver of informed consent language (see Appendix B), (b) a series of demographic questions (see Appendix C), and (c) the mindfulness survey (see Appendix D). Participants who completed the survey and who were confirmed to be valid participants in that they met the study's criteria for experienced change leaders were asked if they would be willing to participate further in the study and invited to sit for an interview. This process continued until 19 interviews had been scheduled and completed.

Interviewees were not sent the interview questions in advance. They were advised that the purpose of the research was to learn how leaders like them, who are experienced in delivering transformational organizational change, deal with the attendant ambiguity for themselves and for others. They were also advised that the researcher was interested in investigating what strategies and techniques they use in managing ambiguity and uncertainty during transformational organizational change. The topic of mindfulness as being part of the focus of the research was not disclosed to either referrers or participants ahead of the interview but was only discussed within the interview itself after the subject of dealing with ambiguity during transformational change had been explored. This was done to avoid, as much as possible, introducing bias around mindfulness during the participant selection process.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Confidentiality and consent procedures were followed to protect participants from harm and the researcher and university from legal exposure. The study was conducted under the guidance of the Pepperdine University Institutional Review Board and all human subjects protections guidelines were observed.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Data for this study were collected using a survey and an interview. These instruments are described in the following sections.

**Survey.** This study used the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire (FFMQ) (Baer et al., 2006). This instrument is described in detail below. The survey was presented to study participants in an online survey tool and was represented to them as a survey that would examine “their general approach to life” (as opposed to identifying the questionnaire as being a way to assess the participant’s level of mindfulness).

Baer et al. (2006) developed the FFMQ at a time when five mindfulness assessments had been recently developed. These researchers wanted a questionnaire that would bring together the most commonly used mindfulness questionnaires into one (Sauer et al., 2013) and reflect the multidimensional nature of mindfulness (Baer et al., 2006). They found the five mindfulness questionnaires under study to be consistent with one another and with meditation experience. They also determined that the instruments performed as predicted with respect to other variables related to mindfulness. Finally, Baer et al explored what they called “facets” of mindfulness and found that the data from their study supported the notion of “mindfulness as a multifaceted construct” (Baer et al., 2006, p. 42). The FFMQ measures the five mindfulness factors of “observing, describing,



acting with awareness, nonjudging of inner experience and nonreactivity to inner experience” (Baer et al., 2009, p. 158).

The FFMQ consists of 39 qualitative statements to which the response is a number on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (never or very rarely true) to 5 (very often or always true) (Baer et al., 2006, 2009). Typical statements in this questionnaire are: “When I’m walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving”; “I am easily distracted”; and “In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting.”

The full list of FFMQ questions are comprised of questions with both positive and negative orientations. See Appendix D for the complete list of FFMQ questions. The FFMQ survey was delivered as an online survey because an online format was convenient for the researcher to administer and for the study subjects to complete the questionnaire.

Sauer et al. (2013) report that, based on their assessment of the research, two other mindfulness questionnaires (the Kentucky Inventory of Mindfulness Skill, or KIMS, and the Mindful Attention Awareness Scale, or MAAS) have the widest use in measuring mindfulness, followed by the FFMQ. The predictive validity of these instruments has been tested in a number of studies, with the following outcomes where good predictive qualities were found for the instruments: (a) MAAS supported by nine studies, (b) KIMS supported by three studies, and (c) FFMQ supported by two studies. While the MAAS mindfulness instrument has the most research supporting its use, it has a one-dimensional aspect and is focused on mindlessness versus mindfulness. As well, there has been some recent criticism of this instrument as being a measure of how inattentive a person is, rather than reflecting how mindful they are (Grossman, 2011). On the other hand, the FFMQ incorporates several of the instruments and gives the

opportunity to determine the presence of multiple subcomponents of mindfulness, which might have been of some possible use during the qualitative portion of this research study. Ultimately the researcher chose to use the FFMQ as the measure of mindfulness for participants in this study.

**Interview script.** The interview assessed how the respondents coped and how they helped others deal with the ambiguity associated with a transformational change effort. It also probed whether they felt that mindfulness helped them to deal with that ambiguity and uncertainty. Appendix E presents the interview questions.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Because this study used a parallel convergent mixed methods design, the quantitative and qualitative data were analyzed concurrently. Each of the interviews were recorded and converted into a transcript after the interview had been completed. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times so that the researcher became very familiar with the interview data. Then the transcript data was coded and tagged with an identifier to indicate which participant was the source for that data. Macro and micro codes were used to organize the data into themes. The coding was performed iteratively until the coded data reflected the underlying raw data and the information contained therein. At the end of the analysis the number of participants who mentioned each theme was added to the data. Finally, a second rater tested the validity of the coding and ensured that the data was reflected accurately in the analysis. Overall mindfulness scores were summed and reported for each participant. Fictional names were applied in order to protect the identities of the participants.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed the research methodology for this research project including the research design, sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures that were used in this study. The next chapter will report on the results.

## Chapter 4

### Results

The purpose of this study is to examine how experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and to determine whether mindfulness helps them do that. The research questions are:

1. How does ambiguity during transformational organizational change affect participants in that change?
2. What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change?
3. In what ways might mindfulness help experienced change leaders during transformational organizational change?
4. Do change leaders with high levels of mindfulness deal with ambiguity differently than low mindfulness change leaders?

This chapter reports the results of the study. It provides the reader with an overview of the findings and the themes generated from the data collected during the study. Following an overview of the demographic characteristics of the participants in the study and the types of change efforts they have led, there is a discussion on how ambiguity shows up for participants in transformational organizational change. Then the strategies used by experienced change leaders to manage and cope with that ambiguity for themselves are outlined, followed by the strategies they use to help others deal with ambiguity. The results of the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire that was administered to each of the participants are presented, followed by a comparison of how the four most mindful and four least mindful experienced change leaders employ the ambiguity-management strategies mentioned above. Finally, the use of mindfulness during transformational organizational change is discussed. This chapter closes with a summary.

## Participant Demographics

Nineteen change leaders who are experienced in leading transformational organizational change were recruited from the researcher's network. Participants included a mix of professionals both male and female ranging from 30 to 69 years of age. Company sizes from small (1–99 employees) to large (50,000 or more employees) were represented. Years of change leadership were 1–5 years at the low end to 16–19 years of experience at the upper end. Some of the change leaders have led as many as 11 transformational change projects. Most of the transformational change initiatives lasted from 1 to 2 years, with some extending to 3–5 years in duration. See Table 5 for the breakdown of these demographics.

**Table 5**

### *Participant Demographics*

<b>Personal Demographics</b>	<b>Professional Background</b>
<b>Gender</b> Male: 10 Female: 9 <b>Age</b> 30-39 years: 3 40-49 years: 11 50-59 years: 4 60-69 years: 1	<b>Company Size</b> 1-99 employees: 2 100-999 employees: 6 1000-9999 employees: 1 10,000-49,999 employees: 6 50,000 or more employees: 5  <b>Title</b> Director: 6 Senior director: 3 Vice president/senior vice president: 2 Senior executive/partner: 1 Outside consultant hired as change leader: 6 Dean: 1
<b>Change Leadership Experience</b> <b>Years of change leadership experience</b> 1-5 years: 6 6-10 years: 3 11-15 years: 4 16-19 years: 6  <b>Number of change leadership roles held</b> 1-2: 5 3-5: 8 5-10: 2 11 or more: 4	<b>Average change project duration</b> 1-2 years: 12 3-5 years: 6 Not specified: 1

The study participants were leaders in a number of different types of change efforts (see Table 6). These include atypical acquisitions where financial difficulties or large differences in their respective cultures created a great deal of ambiguity in the attempts to integrate the companies. Some change efforts were organization- or department-level initiatives and others involved restructuring of operations. When describing the change programs they led, participants cited fast growth of the company, regulatory compliance initiatives and the opinion that ambiguity is endemic to all change as other reasons for change initiatives with high levels of associated ambiguity.

The reason that was mentioned most often, by 8 of 19 participants, was strategy implementation or reorganization. Study participants described these as major change efforts with a lot of moving parts and associated ambiguity, often with concomitant risks for workers at these companies such as layoffs and reductions in force. These transformational change programs might also include changes in product and go-to-market strategies, often as a result of external market forces such as the loss of a customer that represented 50% of the company's revenue, or the financial meltdown of 2008, or radical changes in the company's industry. Elizabeth stated that the transformational change she was involved in had a tremendous amount of ambiguity associated with it: "Changing the organization, the leadership, the products we were selling, how we were selling. Everything was changing so it was very, very ambiguous."

Another study participant described the scope of the change initiative that he led:

[It was] a big organizational change. We had a team of 35-40 managers and we reduced the team by 11 people. Reorganized pretty much the entire leadership team to the point where all managers were impacted in some way. Either they had a new boss, or they lost a peer, or they were being asked to take on additional responsibilities they didn't have before. It was a lot of people impacted by the change.

**Table 6*****Participants' Change Efforts***

Type of Change Effort	n
Strategy implementation or reorganization	8
Atypical acquisition	3
Organization- or department-level change initiatives	2
Restructuring operations	3
Fast-growing company	1
Regulatory changes or initiatives	1
Ambiguity is endemic to all change	1

*N* = 19

**Effects of Ambiguity**

**Effects of ambiguity on change leaders.** The presence of ambiguity during transformational organizational change appears to vary widely between participant change leaders and some of them experienced more than one of the effects, not necessarily at the same time (see Table 7).

**Table 7*****Effects on Change Leader***

Effect on Change Leader	n
Felt anxiety, distress, and discomfort	8
No strong reaction	6
Experienced self-doubt	4
Felt energized	4

*N* = 19

For 8 of the 19 change leaders, the associated ambiguity in their transformational change caused them to feel anxiety, distress and discomfort. Here are some of the typical comments on how it felt when the ambiguity showed up for them.

John described how he felt when he learned that his organization was about to go through a major strategic reorganization in response to the financial crisis of 2008, which he knew would involve major layoffs including his own position:

First of all, [I realized] that a very comfortable environment where I had felt like I had made some significant contributions was coming to an end . . . so obviously that creates a lot of ambiguity because you don't know what's going to be next. For me . . . I like to know where I'm going. I have personally not been really comfortable with change. . . . I'm wired with wanting to make a decision quickly, to quickly evaluate options and move forward. So being in a place of ambiguity for a long period of time raises my personal stress.

Elizabeth described her discomfort with the ambiguity associated with the transformational change she participated in as follows:

It was the hardest year of my life. If you talk about putting leaders in the stretch zone, I was really in the stretch zone and so were a lot of people. We were changing so much all at once. . . . I had a lot anxiety around it . . . that made me spin a lot.

Melanie said she felt this way during ambiguity:

I am very much on the journey of how not to react and try to control, but how to be restful in the midst of ambiguity . . . because I find if it's highly ambiguous . . . my stress level goes up with that. . . . Ambiguity creates [high] amounts of stress.

On the other hand, 6 of the leaders said that they didn't feel a strong reaction to the presence of ambiguity during transformational organizational change. Violet's comment was typical:

For me personally, honestly, I don't remember having a lot of fear. . . . In a lot of ways it was a lot of pressure and a lot of work, but I didn't have an emotional reaction to it.

Tony described his lack of reaction this way:

For me the effects of the ambiguity weren't very much. . . . I wasn't in . . . a state of ambiguity as much as the organization was because I came into this as a consultant to help them to navigate through that ambiguity and to help them lay out a clear path of what they needed to do.

For Sean, it was:



I'm actually someone who handles pressure quite well. I keep my head about me. I don't [wear] my emotions on my sleeve. Even if I'm having [feelings] internally, I'm pretty good about being able to . . . compartmentalize them inside me and say, "This isn't a reflection of me, it's a reflection on the business. How do we resolve it?" The role that I played at the time was integration lead and [I] was focused on keeping my head about me as everybody was going crazy. Trying to keep everything battened down, but at the same time moving forward rapidly around [bringing] the two organizations together and all the activity that went along those lines.

**Effects of ambiguity on employees.** Where employees who are participating in transformational organizational change are concerned, the effects of ambiguity showed up as two types: mental / emotional reactions and behavioral reactions (see Table 8).

**Table 8**

*Effects on Employees*

Effect on Employees	n
Mental and emotional reactions	
Felt high anxiety and distress	10
Uncertainty/didn't know what to think	8
Behavioral reactions	
Expressed skepticism and resistance	3
Acted out	3
Differed in ability to get up to speed and on board	3

*N* = 19

Under the category of mental and emotional reactions to ambiguity by employees, the first type of reaction was feeling high anxiety and distress. For Peggy, whose organization was about to undergo multiple rounds of significant layoffs, employees responded with:

Mistrust. Cliques. Tribalism. Just a lot of fear-based behaviors. Last-ditch effort behaviors to look good, to outshine [their] competition, to side with people who they thought were more in favor or more protected. Just anger. At that time for me a lot of people were coming into my office and venting. It was threatening their livelihoods. It was a pretty big deal.

Melanie, whose organization was undergoing a restructuring of operations, stated:

Lots of people [were] outside of their comfort zones. I think it can cause a lot of concern, particularly when you're dealing with people's jobs and livelihoods and forcing them to ask questions that they don't know the answers to. Oftentimes people don't want to be pushed outside of their comfort zone, or they like to be considered the experts at their areas of the business. That's one of the challenges.

For Anna, in her organization it was that:

You had changing leadership and visibly conflicting leadership . . . and then you inject into that a brand new leader, who is new to everybody in that environment, and is taking people down an approach that required all of the teams to really come together and was very consciously about "Hey we're going to transform this business." So everybody in that situation felt threatened by change, and headed down a path that they didn't necessarily see the end state or goal.

The second type of reaction to ambiguity experienced by employees, under the category of mental and emotional reactions, was uncertainty along with employees who were not quite sure what to think about all of the ambiguity that was going on. Sean expressed one of the ways this manifested in his company:

If you look at it from [the acquired company's] perspective, there were all these employees that up until the week before thought the company was doing OK. I don't think any of them were so naive as to think it was doing well or great, but I don't think any of them realized that they were that close to the edge. You had 20 or 30 employees that had the rug pulled out from underneath them. They didn't know what they were going to do for employment, and they didn't know what to think of this new company coming and trying to acquire them.

For Catherine and her company, it showed up like this:

So what was really ambiguous about it was people had different concepts of what this meant. They didn't know how their managers and leadership teams really felt about it and so there was a lot of questioning. "Do you really want me to go work in the park? Am I really allowed to do that? I grew up thinking that if I had four windows and a corner office that meant that I had merit in my career and now you're telling me that not having an office but having freedom is the substitute."

And finally, Susan said:

[In our transformational change, which involved moving to a matrix organization, people are wondering] Who is in charge? Who says what? What does this mean to me? All those kinds of basic but important things that go on when you're shifting an org structure. Is it going to work? Are people ultimately going to come along? Are we going to have to make some hard decisions if people aren't going to adapt to the change? How am I going to perform? Those sorts of things.

When faced with transformational change and the ambiguity that accompanies it, some employees have behavioral reactions. One form of this occurs when employees who are affected by the change express skepticism and resistance to it. Terence described it like this:

Ultimately they all face the same kind of decision process to go through, which is to initially be skeptical and challenge and question, especially if it's [a] difficult change like cost reduction or it means they're going to have to do something different or their job is going to significantly change, then you'll typically get a lot of resistance. Why aren't we doing something? Why aren't we doing it differently?

Some employees are so frustrated that they actually act out, as they did in

Catherine's company:

Some people were extremely angry even though we were really gutting five buildings and they were moving into a space that was much bigger than anything they had ever worked in. They were still angry and so we actually had people destroying things. An example: we had someone that stuffed paper towels down the toilet so that those paper towels got to street level and clogged the whole [sewer] main for the building. So we couldn't use the bathroom and people called OSHA because the bathroom [wasn't] available for a certain amount of hours and things like that. So, there was some real acting out . . . [because] there was a lot of ambiguity.

The third behavioral reaction to ambiguity, for employees, is that people differed in their abilities to get up to speed and on board with the change. According to Anna, this showed up as:

You had a lot of people who had been in both organizations for a long time, really tenured people, and people [for whom] frankly the status quo was working for them. So they were getting very much pushed out of their comfort zones and not necessarily in a position where they were able or believed they were able to help drive the change, and in many cases didn't feel like they should change. For quite a few people [it was], "My stuff's not broken, why are you messing with it" and [they] were very change-resistant. For those people it was an incredibly uncomfortable period.

**Other effects of ambiguity.** Besides the effects on the change leader and on employees, the ambiguity that is manifested during transformational organizational

change also affects other aspects of the change initiative. This includes the change project itself, senior leadership and the organization as a whole (see Table 9).

**Table 9**  
*Other Effects of Ambiguity*

Other Effect	n
Effect on Project	
Scope expanded as new issues emerged	2
Ignited teamwork	1
No impact outside the primary participants	1
Effect on Leadership	
Actively worked against the change	2
Doubted the strategy	1
Felt substantial stress and anxiety	1
Effect on Organization	
Atmosphere was very tense	1
The change was good for the organization as a whole	1

*N* = 19

At the project level, there is a range of effects of ambiguity. Because of the nature of transformational change where the change activities are emergent and shifting as the change moves forward, naturally the scope of ambiguity expands as new issues emerge. In one case, ambiguity seemed to fire up people's inclination to work together and ignited teamwork. In another case, there wasn't any impact from the inherent ambiguity outside of the primary participants in the change. Terence gave his assessment on how ambiguity can change the scope:

What I've often found is that no matter the clarity of strategic intent or vision [with which] you set up any kind of transformational change . . . both the path to get to that vision and . . . that vision and strategy changes. . . . The journey is very uncertain, and the destination can sometimes shift during the process of transformational change. So, [you have to recognize] that you're never going to have perfect information. . . . Ambiguity and a lack of clarity is one of the things that you have to solve for to be successful.

At the organizational leadership level, there were some surprising effects of ambiguity where behaviors occurred that you would not expect to see from leaders. Some leaders actively worked against the change, some were more passive and merely doubted the strategy while others felt substantial stress and anxiety about the change. In the company where a senior leader was actively working to thwart the change, Brendan describes the situation:

I had one instance where . . . the chief legal officer of an acquired entity was negative on the deal . . . and because [her office was remote from our headquarters] she was . . . espousing her concerns, her negativity. It was almost as if where her office was physically located was the ground zero and [all] around her people that she would interact with regularly, you could see them going negative, asking more challenging questions, just making them uncomfortable. . . . So, they started to question even if they weren't worried: "Should I be worried? I thought everything was going great and management is doing everything they can do make sure they're doing the change effectively and communicating". . . . In this case I ended up spending a lot of time back and forth . . . until I found "patient zero" and figured out that [she] wasn't going to be part of the long-term solution. We parted company. It was unfortunate. She was a talented individual, great at her job. But just couldn't see herself anywhere in the end solution and we couldn't find a way to get her in a happy place.

### **Change Leaders' Coping and Management Strategies for Ambiguity**

In examining what strategies change leaders use to manage and cope with their own reactions to the ambiguity inherent in transformational organizational change, it was discovered that there are six types of strategies utilized for this purpose (see Table 10). While these strategies may sound like they are simply a list of generally accepted best practices for leading transformational change, it is important to note that when they are employed as a means to mitigate and deal with the ambiguity of transformational change, they are described by change leaders as tools with a very specific intention.

**Table 10***Change Leaders' Self-Oriented Coping and Management Strategies*

Coping and Management Strategy	N
Personal practices	
Practiced self-awareness and self-care	10
Got centered	5
Intentionally embraced ambiguity	3
Normalized the anxiety and distress	1
Project initiation and other early actions	
Clarified goals and direction	6
Secured executive support within and outside the organization	6
Learned as much as possible about the situation and possibilities	4
Assembled strong execution team	2
Ongoing actions	
Sought guidance and support	12
Professional advice (6)	
Sounding board (3)	
Emotional support (3)	
Exercised an agile, action-oriented approach	6
Exercised courageous, bold leadership	5
Trusted the process and the tools	2

*N* = 19

The first set of ambiguity coping strategies used by participating change leaders consist of personal practices, including practicing self-awareness and self-care (such as physical exercise, yoga, meditation, therapy, coaching, hobbies, and taking breaks); getting centered (trusting one's gut and staying present in the moment, having a personal mission statement, staying centered at an emotional level, getting centered through spiritual practices); getting comfortable with ambiguity (choosing to move forward rather than swirling, giving up on worrying, actively choosing to embrace the ambiguity); and normalizing the anxiety and distress (finding balance within the anxious state). Here change leaders described the types of activities they use to manage and mitigate ambiguity for themselves. Brendan described his self-care practices:

I find catharsis in doing something totally different than the thing that I do at work. My wife calls it making wood chips. So I go to my woodshop in my garage. I may build something. What I build doesn't matter. Whatever it is. For a long time it was fishing. Getting out, away from everything. Getting out on my boat and getting out of sight of land, away from cell phone reception and seeing clear blue in every direction, just this blue dome. It was cathartic to do something totally different. That actually focused my effort around a goal. Catching fish. Figuring out where the fish are. That sort of reset for me is my way of getting out of my head. You have to walk away from the problem and then really come back to it with a set of fresh eyes.

John says that he has used his mindfulness meditation practice to deal with ambiguity during transformational change:

At the personal level, as I was working on my executive coaching program that led to ICF certification, I began a more formal practice [of meditation]. I have always had a prayer practice that has grounded me in ambiguous situations, but I . . . expanded that to include [Jon Kabat-Zinn's] body scan meditations. I developed that as a practice during that yearlong certification process. I found that focusing in a meditative way in addition to my personal prayer practice really helped center me to be more flexible when change occurs.

The second set of strategies that participating change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves come under the heading of project initiation and other early actions. These consist of clarifying goals and direction (ranges from getting clear on strategy and approach to identifying key priorities); securing executive support within and outside of the organization; learning as much as possible about the situation and possibilities (includes defining project scope, roles and responsibilities as well as anticipating possible outcomes and creating contingency plans); and assembling a strong execution team. In discussing the use of these types of approaches to mitigate ambiguity for him as a change leader, George said:

All of the dialogue we had between each other really made it so that we had a clear understanding as a team of what we were trying to accomplish; so . . . we had guiding principles that set the stage for where we were trying to go and what we were trying to do. When a question came up, the overall goal and vision and strategy helped us answer that question fairly easily. So, I think from a tactics

perspective what we did to mitigate the ambiguity was keeping open lines of communication between ourselves.

Many of the change leaders spoke about how important it is to have strong support from senior leadership and executives, and when they had that support it helped to mitigate the ambiguity for them. Sean described it this way:

I'd summarize and say if you look at it as a pie, one slice of the pie is dealing with pressure, and another slice is having really good air cover, from the leadership team that I was representing. Knowing that they had my back; that I didn't have to look over my shoulder every five minutes wondering if somebody was upset. I had quite a bit of autonomy, authority, and power to resolve issues and drive things forward. I had quite a bit of clout within the organization to get [leadership] to jump whenever I needed them [to back me up].

“Ongoing actions” comprise the third category of self-oriented coping strategies for change leaders dealing with ambiguity. These include seeking guidance and support, such as getting professional advice (from a hired consultant, a mentor or simply a trusted advisor), looking for trusted people to act as a sounding board, and finally getting emotional support. The distinction between these latter two activities is that having a sounding board is primarily about obtaining advice and counsel, whereas emotional support was about finding someone with whom it was safe to vent about issues and frustrations. Tony talked about a particularly close mentor who has been instrumental for him in honing his skills at leading transformational change:

I was doing a lot of work [with] and I still have a pretty close relationship with Darrell Connor. I'm not sure if you are exposed to his work. . . . Darrell's been doing this work for 40 years. When you look back at who are the global leaders in change, it always goes back to John Kotter . . . and then Darrell Connor. Darrell's been doing this work since the early 70s, and [is] just an incredible thought leader in the space of what leaders go through and what organizations go through during transformational change.

John described how he seeks guidance and support this way:

The other [strategy] . . . is having somebody that you can talk to. For me often it is my wife. We can play out the various scenarios, do a plan. I find talking through



those things helpful. . . . I think having someone [with whom] you can share what you're feeling [who can] help you in whatever your strategies are [and assist in] planning [and generating] scenario options is very helpful.

Catherine spoke about how she used the “venting” strategy to manage ambiguity for herself:

I think talking it through [really helped me]. I had a couple of people that I trusted and I could just say, “Help me through this situation.” I had two people in particular that I could just blow off steam with, and tell them what was on my mind and how I was really feeling and not have to feel bad about it and know that it wasn't going to be taken as how I felt long term. [I'd have my] my emotional outbursts with those people, I'd end up laughing and letting off steam. I needed some places and some times to just say, “I'm totally frustrated” and be where I was really at. And once I [could] verbalize that, then I was OK. Then it was like, “OK, I'm over it. Let's get to work. Buckle the seatbelts again.”

The final three strategies that change leaders use to manage their own reactions to ambiguity are exercising an agile, action-oriented approach, exercising courageous and bold leadership, and trusting the process and tools. Anna takes this approach to exercising courageous and bold leadership:

For me the difference was being a part of it and helping drive it versus having it happen to me. Very much choosing to be a part of that change, and a part of defining the road map and the path we were going down. I guess saying that it was a control issue, of myself in control [and] helping to drive the change versus waiting for it to happen to me.

### **Helping Others Deal with Ambiguity**

The primary strategy that leaders who are experienced in transformational organizational change use to help others deal with the attendant ambiguity is by articulating the strategy and direction, early and often (see Table 11). Elizabeth described it this way:

[In thinking about how I helped] others [deal with ambiguity], I think the ongoing theme [in my role] as a leader of transformation was acknowledging for other people: “Yeah, this is hard what we're doing. Yes, I know we changed our mind again. It's OK. We're going to keep going.” [I also tried] to tie people back to the bigger vision of it. “Yes we're on track with this. Yes this is why we're doing

this. Yes this is hard. It's OK." Acknowledging for other people that it's hard but that we have a purpose for doing it. . . . It's sort of like knowing that the airplane is heading in the right direction [and also] knowing that it's going to change course the whole time. Just showing people that. The best I can do is [to say], "We have a vision and a purpose. In this moment it doesn't seem like it, but let's get back to that bigger vision."

**Table 11**

*Change Leadership Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity*

Guidance or Expertise Provided	n
Articulated vision and direction	10
Demonstrated confident, strong change leadership	6
Execute a coordinated, well-planned effort	3
Secured early wins to build confidence and sense of success	3
Normalized and capitalized on ambiguity	2

*N* = 19

Staying true to the purpose and the vision for the transformational change and coming back to that over and over throughout the change process is also important at the organization's senior leadership level. About this Tony said:

Since it was a large transformation that the company was going through, the president of the company really was [the] one in a position to sponsor the transformation, sponsor the change. I spent a long time working with him as well as his direct reports, and I led him through a series of working sessions where we got really clear about why we must change, what are the implications if we don't, what does our future direction look like. Really helping them with the overall strategic intent of [what] the transformation needed to be over the next 12-24 months. . . . [In the] last session I held with them just before we really started rolling it out to the rest of the organization, [I asked the leadership] "Hey, are you really serious about this? Do you think that we can really pull this off?" It's almost the last opportunity for them to save face before they're going to go out to the rest of the organization and say, "This is a business imperative for us. We are kind of on that platform where need to make the change and there's no going back."

In the sharing of the vision and direction with the members of the organization, it is helpful and necessary to tie it in to people's day-to-day activities, as Brendan described. To de-escalate the visceral reactions to change, he paints the vision and connects the change effort to that:

So I think . . . the path to a happy resolution was being really clear [about] what [the] strategic end goal was. Making change happen . . . is . . . counter to human nature, even [for] the most change-embracing people. [To counteract the] threat to [peoples'] overarching well-being you've got to reset what the new normal is. [I do this by] painting the target or describing what the new world looks like under the present strategic focal area. When people can start relating their day-to-day activities to the achievement of the tactics and how that contributes to the overarching strategy, change becomes very palatable.

The other main strategy that experienced change leaders use to help others deal with ambiguity during transformational organizational change is to demonstrate their own confident, strong change leadership for the members of the organization. It appears that this goes a long way to helping reduce the feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty that their teams will face throughout the change process. To continue with Brendan, here's how he described his approach to demonstrating his own confidence around the strategic direction of the transformational change:

Specific to uncertainty, in my professional life there are almost no people that I share that particular aspect of myself. . . . I don't share my self-doubt; I don't share my own recriminations or any of the dialogue that goes on when there's uncertainty. I don't think it serves a great purpose, particularly when leading a team. I think they want to feel like if they see me walk the hall I'm careful in how I present myself. That I'm professional, that I'm calm, that I have my game face on . . . I'm in the game. . . . We've all worked for people that run around with their hair on fire and they're revealing every issue and it's a super uncomfortable feeling . . . when it feels like you observe leadership to be out of control. . . . It's the exact opposite of what you should do as a leader. It's not about masking it. It's about how you deal with it and [your care about] where it's communicated. . . . [Ultimately] it . . . comes down to really good leadership.

As Tony confirms, it's important for the senior leadership who are sponsoring the transformational change to do the work of getting comfortable with their own levels of uncertainty and reactions to the ambiguity up front so that they are in a position to lead the rest of the organization through the change process:

On the front end, a lot of my work and conversation was how I build alignment amongst the senior leadership team and it was all said in the context of, "Hey look, you're all going through this transformational change together. You're all

active targets of all this first. Until you deal with those issues and concerns that you have with each other and with . . . [the] company president, it's going to be really hard for you to sponsor the change with the rest of the company." I then set up a process where the president met one on one with each of his direct reports and just through a facilitated conversation we hashed out what issues and concerns that each of them had, and whether or not they can really personally commit to what needed to be done.

Bottom line, it seems to all come down to the mindset of the change leader and his or her ability to project their own confidence in the chosen strategic direction as they lead the change. For Donal, this takes courage and commitment and, in lieu of certainty, he must trust his own knowledge, expertise, confidence and willingness to be accountable:

I found that to be modestly successful in terms of bolstering my conviction that this was the right thing for us to do, I did feel a stronger sense of courage in terms of heading in this direction. It required a lot more . . . trust-building. . . . I tried to carry forward what knowledge I had. So I tried the best I could to share that with others and to basically put my reputation on the line. There was another sense to that. I asked others to trust me at some level; that I felt this was worthwhile and I was willing to be accountable if it failed. A question came up along the way from a stakeholder. They asked, "Whose neck is going to be on the line if this fails?" I remember offering to put my own neck on the line. I felt that confident that it was the right thing to do.

***Communication strategies to help others deal with ambiguity.*** A majority of the leaders interviewed for this study agreed that communication strategies are a key means of helping those involved in the transformational change to deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty that comes along with that change. There are several essential components that must be included (see Table 12). First a communication plan must be created and honored. This communication plan must then be facilitated all across the organization. In terms of the purpose and contents of the communications, the strategic goals of the transformational change effort must be included and connected with employees' day-to-day work activities. Expectations for the future must be set and employees' support for

the change must be rallied. Over time, the status of the activities of the change project must also be communicated. There are a number of techniques that may be utilized when executing the communications plan in order to disseminate information about the change across the organization. The most often cited of these were holding one-on-one meetings and informal dialogues, using multiple modalities to expand reach, communicating repeatedly (which means both frequency and repetition of information), and using metaphors and other approaches to facilitate understanding among change constituents.

**Table 12**

*Communication Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity*

Communication Strategy	n
Created and honored a communication plan	3
Facilitated communication up and down organization	2
Purpose and Contents of Communication	
Strategic goals and how change activities and employees' work connect to it	5
Set expectations for the future	4
Induce employees' support for change	4
Status of change project	1
Techniques	
Held one-on-one meetings and informal dialogues	8
Used multiple modalities to expand reach	7
Communicated repeatedly	4
Used metaphors and other approaches to promote understanding	4

*N* = 19

According to Catherine, the communication plan put in place for their transformational change helped them to get buy-in from those “on the fence”. Happy people and the really unhappy people generally didn’t change their attitudes:

Probably the biggest thing [was that since] this was a very large change effort, we put together a communications plan. We told the employees out loud at a town hall meeting that this is when we would communicate. This is when they would know more and we told them that in between times they probably wouldn’t know more. So we set the expectation. We didn’t miss it. If we said we were going to talk to you in June and we’re going to give you information in June, before the last day in June, no matter what, even if we didn’t have very much information to

share, we shared what we had. We really stuck to our communication plan. . . . The people that were happy were happy anyway. . . . For whatever reason, they were buying in. The people that were on the fence I think were the ones that came to the, “Oh wait a minute. This is why we’re doing this. This is really positive.” I think there was a big conversion of the people who were on the fence. There was some conversion of the people that were negative, but some that were negative were going to be negative anyway. It didn’t affect them one bit.

Christian said that setting strategic goals and then showing employees (through the communications plan) how their individual work efforts tie into the strategic goals for the change helps employees to understand how their contributions are forwarding the action:

Where I see this tend to impact more . . . is with . . . junior people. . . . Oftentimes, because those individuals are very focused on their particular piece of the puzzle, it can get very overwhelming when they’re brought into these stand-ups that I do with the entire team, because they’re not constantly seeing the big picture. One of the things that I try to do to get their focus back on their particular piece . . . [is] to [help them to] see the full picture, where we’re going. . . . They tend to be a little less fatigued by that.

Of the techniques used to disseminate information about the transformational change across the organization, as previously mentioned the most often-used techniques were one-on-one meetings and informal dialogues, as well as using multiple modalities to expand reach.

Sean says that meeting with people one-on-one, especially on an ad hoc basis, was key to building trust and credibility with those employees:

I spent quite a bit of time out with the team in California. I got to know the leaders there and work[ed] through a number of the issues [with them]. One of the things I think I do really well is I’m able to put people at ease, even when they’re going through a struggle, challenge-oriented process. I’m able to build relationships there. What happens is whenever I’d go out and visit people I’d drag my counseling couch around a bit and just let them crawl up on it and tell me about their woes. In doing so I was able to build quite a bit of credibility and relationships with those folks, so that when things did get bad they were able to reach out and I was able to reach out to them. It got to where I was able to reach out and ask them to do things that maybe they wouldn’t normally be willing to do just because of that trust that I had built up.

Many of the leaders interviewed for this study used a combination of communications methods to make sure they expanded their reach all across the organization. The change leaders communicated proactively and comprehensively with the objective of reaching people within the rest of the organization in the ways that they, as individuals, could hear and absorb the message. This meant that multiple communication modalities were used, including email, intranet, individual meetings, group meetings, all-hands and town hall meetings (company-wide as well as at individual sites). Here is how Christian described his approach regarding communication plans during transformational change:

Fleshing out what I said before, just understanding what the communications cycles are going to be like, what the messaging is going to be like, and then setting those milestones. From a more structural standpoint, one of the things I do with each of the teams is to create those rhythms of communication.

Over the course of a transformational organizational change it is important to have strategies to build capacity for dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty within the employee population, which in turn helps those employees to better deal with the ambiguity that is going on throughout the change effort (see Table 13). There are three major strategies that the experienced change leaders interviewed for this study used to build employee capacity to deal with ambiguity: determining who would be involved and how, addressing the emotions and experiences that occurred for the employees during the change process, and providing targeting guidance for employees.

Table 13

*Capacity Building Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity*

Capacity Building Strategy	n
Determined who would be involved and how Involved employees in the change (9) Changed team composition as needed (4) Clarified roles and responsibilities (3)	16
Addressed their emotions and experiences Sought to understand them, show empathy, and offer support (9) Normalize the anxiety and distress and help people find inner resilience (3)	12
Provided targeted guidance Coached others how to deal with the change (6) Provided education and tools (3)	9

*N* = 19

Regarding the overall strategy of determining who would be involved in the change process and how, one of the first things to do is to involve employees in the change. There are numerous ways of doing this that were cited by study participants. Some of these include making it fun (by socializing, bringing in food, etc.), giving people an active role in designing what the “new normal” will look like, leveraging employee’s natural strengths in terms of how they get involved, identifying “change ambassadors” or “internal champions” to assist in reaching out to the broader employee population, encouraging people to “own” their part of the change process and letting them run with that, and mobilizing people as quickly as possible to get involved in the change. John outlined how his company, like others in this study, used a change ambassador program to great effect:

The first [step] was reaching out within each department in the organization and identifying individuals who could potentially become change ambassadors. We knew the company would continue. This was a far bigger project than one group or one individual could handle. So we needed to develop the capacity within the organization to have folks who could help lead the change efforts. I created the change ambassador program that was like a “train the trainer”. We identified key individuals in each of the functional areas and brought them together, invited them to be the change ambassador representing their function. We went through a



series of workshops, almost lunch-and-learns, over a regular period. Each month we would get together and we would roll out the company's tools and processes that would enable . . . the organizational change that was going to occur [and] we also tried to equip them with personal transition skills to help the individuals and their groups.

The second theme within the category of “determining who would be involved and how” was changing team composition as needed. This can range from something simple, such as looking at whether a naysayer is actually providing valuable feedback about the change initiative, all the way to figuring out who needs to stay and who needs to go in the case where there are some organization members who just can't get on board with the changes. Bringing in outside help, as in consultants, was also cited here. Tony described what was involved for his organization around changing team composition during transformational change:

And we set the expectation early on the front end. We said, “Hey look it, it's natural when organizations go through large transformation that 20-30% of you aren't going to make it.” We stated that . . . at the front end, saying, “This doesn't mean that you're going to be asked to leave the company. It just means that you may not commit to it. We may have to move you to another part of the business, where you're not involved in the transformation but you're back involved in running the business kinds of things.”

The third and final theme in the “determining who would be involved and how” strategy is about clarifying roles and responsibilities. Many of the leaders in this study talked about how crucial this is to help employees deal with ambiguity and uncertainty during transformational change. One of them was Christian:

Looking at the team that will be assisting with the project, I'll typically sit down with the team fairly early on and then regularly throughout the project to help define their roles. In the case of the [current] project . . . if I know that there's going to be a fair amount of ambiguity throughout the project, at least I know if people are fairly clear about what their roles are, that won't be something that we have to deal with throughout the project like we would if we just said “everybody jump in and help out where you can”. . . . Role clarity also gets some of the early concerns out. Going through this exercise early gives each person a chance to . . . experience that conflict [in a certain way] without it being an escalated situation. I

think it's about establishing the stability wherever we can [by] helping them understand what their role is.

The second strategy that the experienced change leaders used to build capacity in employees for dealing with ambiguity was addressing their emotions and experiences. The change leaders did this by seeking to understand them, showing them empathy and offering support. According to some of the change leaders who were interviewed, it is important to consider each employee as an individual as much as possible and tailor one's approach to that specific individual. The leaders said this in different ways, such as "recognizing what it's like for the person who is experiencing the ambiguity", "getting in their shoes and sharing their perspectives and feelings", "be a sounding board for the people who are a little bit sideways with the ambiguity", and "people had to make a big leap in how they thought about working [as a result of the changes we were making], which isn't unusual [for me] as a change agent, so it required deep understanding [on my part]". Melanie described her style of offering empathy to employees undergoing transformational organizational change:

Getting people through that change journey, pushing them outside of their comfort zone, but making sure they're comfortable with that is a reality of most transformational change projects. . . . [I need to have] patience [with] where they struggle and try to be compassionate, [and] offer support where I can. . . . Sometimes you can't say "Well, here's how I can make it more certain." You can't do that because it's just an ambiguous situation. . . . I think that the two pieces that [I] probably lead [with] are empathizing with that individual and how those circumstances impact them and then being compassionate and patient in the midst of it.

There are two ways that experienced change leaders try to reduce ambiguity for employees by providing targeted guidance. The first of these is coaching others on how to deal with the change. Generally this is exactly what it sounds like: working one-on-one

with people to help them know how to proceed during the change, what they can do to get unstuck, providing them with feedback and other such activities.

Peggy described how she approaches the coaching conversation with other leaders in her organization:

I spent a lot of time coaching leaders and getting them out in front of people a lot more frequently than they had ever done before, which at first they really didn't like, because they wanted to have certainty and answers. I said, "That will be too late. You'll have a rebellion on your hands. Even with partial answers, you've got to get out there every week and give a meeting. We've got to do an all-hands meeting every month. Rain or shine. With partial answers. You've got to get out in front of people and be part of it. You can't lock yourself in an ivory tower." A big part of my strategy was to change how we communicated and engaged with the people who were impacted. I think it made a tremendous difference in how people felt about what was happening to them.

The second mechanism for providing targeted guidance is by providing education and tools to employees, which in turn helps them to better deal with the ambiguity inherent in transformational change. The types of education used by the change leaders in this study ranged from very comprehensive change management curriculums to facilitating best practice sessions to informal one-on-one or small group trainings that educated about what to expect during the change process. John shared how his organization rolled out a full change management curriculum for its employees as they went through their transformational organizational change:

Vision was critical, equipping the individuals with transitional skills and the leaders with organizational skills. We had . . . the change ambassador workshops [which were] a four hour "here's what you need to know about supporting organizational change and leading personal transitions", and then we did monthly lunch-and-learns for them. We had a two-hour "managing transitions" [class] that [was] offered weekly for any employee. . . . We also offered a two-hour leading change [class] focusing at the leadership level [where they learned] models and tools for preparing for effective team and functional change. . . . Then we also put together an online change toolkit that we put up on the intranet. . . . We had all of the worksheets that we had developed for all of the classes available to them. We had tips and models. There was a tip card for dealing with change. Checklists and tools and processes for handling emotions as a leader. We had the big change

model that came from Interaction Associates. We had a series of articles on best practices on change. We had several books that were available, and I had a DVD available called “Priorities for Life on Change” by Robert K. Cooper. That became the toolkit that summarized basically how we were approaching this. I called it “Effective Personal and Organizational Change Overview”.

### **Use of Mindfulness During Transformational Organizational Change**

When the interview participants for this study were asked whether mindfulness is helpful for leading transformational organizational change, all 19 agreed that mindfulness is or would be helpful.

**Effects of mindfulness on the change leader.** The most often cited way, mentioned by 10 participants, that mindfulness helps a change leader during transformational change is by enhancing their ability to interact with others (see Table 14). This includes general effects like the change leader’s relationship with others, as stated by Susan:

I think you have to also accept where others are (that’s something I struggle with) as well as your own fit or limitations. I think the whole relationship, relating part, can’t go well if you’re not mindful. I don’t think you can be in relationships and [be] not mindful, really.

**Table 14**

#### *Effects of Mindfulness on Change Leader*

Effect of Mindfulness on Change Leader	n
Enhances ability to interact with others	10
Bolsters ability to maintain perspective	9
Enhances attunement with others’ emotional states	7
Present-moment focus facilitates forward action	6
Enhances resilience and acceptance of ambiguity and stress	6
Builds self-awareness	5

*N* = 19

Another way that mindfulness helps change leaders to interact with others during transformational change is by making a change leader a better resource and advisor to the people involved in the change process, as described by John:

Because I was able to be more present in the moment as we were going through these various things, I was able to attend to and be more aware of what was going on with the individuals I worked with. I had several coaching relationships. As I was going through the certification process I had to have case studies and record coaching conversations and all of that. [Because I was being mindful] I was able, I believe, to be [a] more effective . . . resource for them as they were also going through these changes. I also think that I was able to be a better business advisor to the people who were planning these organizational changes, to 1) be there for them personally and 2) be there and be prepared with best practices to lead organizational change.

The second way that being mindful during transformational change helped the participants be effective leaders of change was that it helped them to maintain perspective during the change process. Of the 9 participants who mentioned this, 4 of them stated that mindfulness gave them a balanced perspective between the big picture and the details.

Terence stated it like this:

[Mindfulness by relating the minutia with the bigger picture]: It helps you put things in context a bit. It's a little ironic that by focusing on the most minutia of your experience helps you see the bigger picture.

Participants also felt that their abilities to maintain their perspective during transformational change were enhanced by mindfulness because it helped them to remain calm and focused in the face of ambiguity. Eileen stated:

Mindfulness is about being present and in the moment and being conscious of your surroundings and being aware of your surroundings. I can't imagine going through a change without having that. You have to be looking around. You have to be reading the signs to understand what is needed, how you can be effective, all of those things. It seems like it is a given. I can't imagine any other way.

Finally, mindfulness helps change leaders during transformational change by enabling them to attune with the emotional states of participants involved in the change

process. For Peggy, being mindful involves what she calls *third level listening*: “I’m listening with my whole self. For sure. I’m looking at their face, I’m reading their body language, and I’m listening to their words.”

For Anna, mindfulness helps a change leader to recognize others’ biases and engage people where they are. It also helps the leader to curb their inappropriate and unproductive emotional responses, all of which builds relationship:

I think you counter bias first of all. We’ve all got these intentional or unintentional biases about why we’re doing a certain thing, what’s the change that it needs to be, that it will affect, what’s the pain all been for? I think being mindful puts you in a position to, in a non-threatening way, challenge some of those biases and uncover problems or realize problems before they truly become problems.

In examining whether experienced change leaders use mindfulness to manage ambiguity during transformational organizational change, it was found that 16 of 19 participants have done so (see Table 15). To ensure that the researcher and the participants were operating from the same definition of mindfulness, the researcher reviewed the definition used for this study with each participant during the interview and before any questions about mindfulness were asked of the participants.

**Table 15**

*Use of Mindfulness to Manage Ambiguity*

Use	n
Have used to manage ambiguity	16
Practices used	
General, not specified	8
Mindful self-awareness and acceptance	7
Mindful other-awareness and acceptance	4

*N* = 19

For Christian, using mindfulness during transformational change has helped him to move beyond his own analytical mindset and “analysis paralysis” during the change process:

For me, one of the things [that is] a constant threat to me is analysis paralysis. Constantly looking for more data, constantly looking for all of the data before I make decisions. There have been times where I have had to be very conscious about making the decisions in the absence of all the data, and I would say that the exercise that I go through in my own head is really taking stock of what’s happening right now, what needs to happen right now, what’s most important now. Even if that’s not exactly being mindful that’s probably an exercise that I’ve gone through. . . . You have to have those periods of time where you reflect and you take stock of where you are at the time.

Catherine said that while she didn’t call it that at the time, she has definitely utilized mindfulness during transformational change:

I think mindfulness is a huge thing . . . for leaders because we’re always . . . moving very fast and making decisions on the fly in transformational change. Trying to slow down, be in the moment, pay attention on purpose, is [such] a challenge that [mindfulness] is really required to do it successfully. As I moved up the leadership pipeline, growing in my leadership capabilities . . . [I did it] through mindfulness, but I didn’t know that’s what it was.

Terence also said that he uses mindfulness during transformational change and, like Catherine, he didn’t necessarily use that term to describe it:

I don’t think I’ve ever called it that. . . . Yes [I have used mindfulness during transformational change]. I think it’s definitely a useful skill to have as a transformational change leader.

While some of the experienced change leaders confirmed that they have used mindfulness to manage ambiguity during transformational change, they didn’t provide any specific ways in which they have done so. For others, when the specific mindfulness practices that they used were mentioned, they tended to fall into two general categories, which are mindful “self-awareness and acceptance” and mindful “other-awareness and acceptance.”

In speaking about mindful self-awareness and acceptance, Terence said that it involves using awareness to affect one's behavior and actions:

Being aware of yourself and your surroundings and using that information to improve how you behave and how you make decisions and how you impact other people.

On the other hand, mindful other-awareness and acceptance is about accepting others and allowing them to show up just as they are. Susan sees it this way:

I'm just now coming to the point where I can say, "Hmm, I don't think that person is ever going to come over here [to see my point of view]. Now what am I going to do?" That's acceptance. Seeing and accepting the reality around you is a maturity for me around mindfulness. . . . [Other-awareness involves] . . . awareness and an ability to see around you and assess that and work with that information. It's about . . . mindfulness around . . . our environment, what our relationships are, that are presenting us with this change.

**Effect of leaders' mindfulness on others.** When asked how they felt that their mindfulness during transformational organizational change affects others involved in the change, the leaders involved in this study identified two primary ways (see Table 16).

**Table 16**

*Effect of Leaders' Mindfulness on Others*

Effect on others	n
Bolsters others' confidence	7
Enhances perception of change agent's integrity and trustworthiness	6
Models behavior for others	3
Affects how others relate	2

*N* = 19

The first of these is that they feel that a leader's mindfulness inspires confidence, which in turn builds confidence within the organization's members. Donal described it this way:

If you have a leader who is comfortable in their own skin, highly self-aware [and] has a handle on their own feelings, from my standpoint it can give you more confidence in that individual because they're in a good state of mind to be able to



make decisions, to be able to lead the organization [and] to be able to ignite change. For me that would tend to also foster confidence in those that he or she is leading. From my standpoint, it would be an element of a confidence-builder for an organization. We're looking for leaders; we're looking for individuals who have those characteristics and qualities.

From Terence's perspective, mindfulness keeps a leader open to input which gives people confidence to contribute:

I've never had a team or a decision that's been made well that hasn't had that kind of situational context in terms of people feeling like they can contribute, people feeling like actually not having the answer is not a bad thing. Having a question is a good thing. To get to that stage of shutting down your internal response and really just blanking your mind and keeping yourself open sounds much more useful to me in that context. It's more of a tool. . . . We're saying that transformational change is really, in many areas, dealing with uncertainty and dealing with uncertainty requires you to be able to ask the right questions and asking the right questions requires you to have an open mind and having an open mind requires you to be mindful. It's an approach that you can talk about that starts to link it together in a way that is pretty compelling I think.

The second effect of the change leader's mindfulness on others that was identified was that it makes the change leader seem trustworthy, with a higher level of integrity, when that transformational change leader is seen to be mindful. Susan believes that mindfulness somehow makes a leader seem safe and therefore more relatable:

Somehow I think that if you are OK with yourself, it makes you a safe person. [When I'm that way] I think others are able to easily relate to me and I believe [they] can often share what their concerns are, especially if I ask. I think that would have a positive impact on people.

Elizabeth stated that mindfulness enhances the credibility of a change leader and allows others to be authentic in their own expressions and actions:

The times when I was being more mindful, I would say it [brought] a calming, trusting, credible kind of presence into the room. Look[ing] at other leaders that I think are really present and mindful, [I see them] just really [being] comfortable in their own being and you don't even question it. They're just there, present with you. I feel like that's what I get from them. They're just there, solid pillar of trust. They're not going to get blown over by the wind. The ones that are frenetic and crazy, it's like, "I'm not sure I want to play over there." I have one person in my mind right now. When I'm in a meeting with him, [because] he's probably one of

the most mindful people that I know, I feel very grounded. I feel like I can be fully whoever I am and authentic. It brings forth the best authenticity of who I am. He inspires me to want to be that kind of leader. I would follow him anywhere.

**Usefulness of mindfulness training for change leaders.** Eighteen of the participants in this study were asked whether they believe that mindfulness training would be helpful in developing future leaders of transformational change. Of these, 12 felt that, in general, mindfulness training for change leaders would be useful (see Table 17).

**Table 17**

*Usefulness of Mindfulness Training for Change Leaders*

Theme	n
Mindfulness training for change leaders would be useful	12
Applied training would be useful	3
Leader needs to want mindfulness training	3

$N = 18$

For Elizabeth, mindfulness training would be beneficial to an organization before and during change and indeed at any time:

I actually do think we're embracing that here [at my company] from a corporate perspective, from what I've heard. I definitely think that whether you're going through a change or not, being mindful [is] great. The way we have these high-paced changes [that] never stop. . . . [Everything] is moving so fast. Any training to help people get present and conscious and open will only benefit [both] the change and the organization.

John is also of the opinion that mindfulness training could help leaders to manage change more effectively:

Absolutely. You can't lead people to higher ground if you're not on higher ground yourself. Especially for those personality types that don't deal well with ambiguity and change, you need to be at a better place than they might be. When people get stuck in that inevitable change cycle . . . you need to be able to diagnose where they're at and you need to come up with the remedy for how to get them unstuck. . . . I think that mindfulness is kind of like a foundational piece for all that. . . . All change leaders need to use [mindfulness] as a strategy

especially if they are, like me, wired to not personally like change, to help them be successful in [leading change].

The participant change leaders had some suggestions around how they thought mindfulness training for transformational change leaders might be made more effective. One suggestion was that it should be delivered as applied training. Rather than providing generalized training in mindfulness, when the objective is to help a leader to be more effective at leading transformational change the mindfulness training should be overtly applied to the business case. Terence stated:

Mindfulness is and can be very useful for self-development. I would almost shape it a little bit more into how mindfulness can help leadership in transformational change. . . . [We can] think about the instances where transformational change is hard, and then use mindfulness training as a way of dealing with those types of situations. . . . I think you'd get better adoption and impact if [the mindfulness training] was applied [to the actual situation].

Other leaders interviewed for this study suggested that mindfulness training would be useful for developing leaders of transformational change *if* change leaders are given the opportunity to opt in to taking the training. These leaders were of the opinion that not everyone will adopt mindfulness unless they choose to. Susan's opinion on this was as follows:

I definitely think that it is critical. I'm also really aware that if people don't want to do that, they're not going to do it. It has to be a personal choice. Talking about it and making it available and providing support for that is really fantastic if you can.

### **Comparison of Strategies Used by High and Low Mindfulness Practitioners**

As part of their participation in this research study, each of the participants completed the Five Facet Mindfulness Questionnaire. The results, with scores ranging from moderate to high with a couple of exceptions, are presented in Table 18. The scores ran from a low of 2.79 to a high of 4.49 on a 5-point Likert scale. Only two participants

(10.5%) had scores below 3; the majority (n = 11, 57.9%) had a score somewhere in the 3 range. Six of the 19 participants (or 31.6%) had scores over 4. It is possible that the participant sample was skewed towards higher levels of mindfulness because leaders who are currently in high enough positions and who have successfully led transformational change may have higher levels of both state and trait mindfulness.

**Table 18**

*Participants' Mindfulness Scores*

	Mean	SD		Mean	SD
Susan	4.49	0.6	Brendan	3.67	0.74
Eileen	4.31	0.8	Tony	3.64	0.74
Terence	4.13	0.57	John	3.59	0.68
Violet	4.03	0.43	Catherine	3.41	0.85
Murray	4.03	1.06	Sean	3.38	0.63
Peggy	4.00	1.10	Henry	3.23	1.01
Christian	3.79	0.66	Maureen	3.21	0.95
George	3.77	1.13	Donal	2.97	0.67
Melanie	3.69	0.52	Elizabeth	2.79	0.57
Anna	3.69	0.69			
Range 2.79-4.49					
Overall 3.67 (0.44)					

1 = low mindfulness, 5 = high mindfulness

**Coping with their experience of ambiguity.** A comparison of the self-oriented ambiguity coping and management strategies between the four participants with the highest mindfulness scores and the four participants with the lowest mindfulness scores, presented in Table 19, revealed six areas of differences.

Table 19

***Change Leaders' Self-Oriented Coping and Management Strategies: High Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners***

Coping and Management Strategy	Low (N = 4)	High (N = 4)
Personal practices		
Practiced self-awareness and self-care	1	3
Got centered	1	1
Got comfortable with ambiguity	2	0
Normalized the anxiety and distress	0	1
Project initiation and other early actions		
Clarified goals and direction	0	2
Secured executive support within and outside the organization	1	2
Learned as much as possible about the situation and possibilities	2	0
Assembled strong execution team	1	0
Ongoing actions		
Sought guidance and support	4	3
Professional advice	1	3
Sounding board	1	0
Emotional support	2	0
Exercised an agile, action-oriented approach	0	3
Exercised courageous, bold leadership	2	0
Trusted the process and the tools	0	1

High mindfulness change practitioners (n=3) more frequently reported self-awareness and self-care as personal coping mechanisms for ambiguity than low mindfulness change practitioners (n = 1). Participants in general used a variety of modalities of self-care and self-awareness to manage the ambiguity that comes along with leading transformational organizational change. These include physical exercise and

yoga, meditation, doing things to relax such as knitting or relating with a pet, therapy and coaching, going for walks and being outside in nature, and taking alone time to think and allow for insights. Eileen, a change leader in the high mindfulness group, said this about her personal self-care practices:

I always make sure that I do things that I enjoy doing. I take time to do things that make me feel relaxed. . . . I do that on a regular basis regardless of what else is happening in the world around me.

Violet takes the physical exercise route:

My coping mechanisms have been physical exercise. . . . I [also] started doing yoga to meditate and turn my monkey brain off. . . . Physical exercise has always helped me deal with feeling overwhelmed. I started doing yoga to meditate and turn my mind off. Yoga changed my life, and I always was a runner and did other things.

For Terence, another leader with high mindfulness, his practice is rather informal:

[I will] go for a walk or just step out of it. . . . I find for myself my coping mechanism is to try to switch off when I come home. Spend time with the family. Not worry about the work stuff.

Elizabeth is in the group of four leaders in this study with the lowest scores on the FFMQ. She employed several methods to increase her self-awareness and take care of herself during the stressful times that occurred during a recent transformational change she helped to lead:

I had to increase my self-care during that period of time. I went for therapy; I went for coaching. Things like that so I could acknowledge what was going on and just keep going. I also did actually start adding a 5-minute meditation time on my calendar at lunch every day. I tried to do that a couple of times a week. Things like that to try to give myself some space.

Participants who scored high in mindfulness were also more likely to clarify goals and direction with the people they are leading through transformational change.

Strategies utilized here include getting clear on the overall goal, vision and strategy for the change initiative and then committing to that strategy. For Terence, it looks like this:

Asking powerful questions. Inquiry before advocacy. [To me this is] why ambiguity and mindfulness are closely related. Curiosity is the common link. Willingness to ask questions, to understand and, even when you think you do understand, [inquiry is] always a useful tactic. . . . [It helps to] get everybody on the same level and direction. But also [to] recognize some of the things that I should be concerned about, [versus] some of the things that I shouldn't actually be concerned about. It's OK to delegate or actually ignore some of those things. Some of it is noise. Recognize the signals.

For Susan, another highly mindful leader, her method of clarifying goals and direction is to use an internal process:

I do a very specific practice around prioritization and what I'm going to focus on. Essentially through a daily meditation practice [that I use] whether I'm going through a process of ambiguity or not. . . . Around work life specifically, I allow myself to kind of relax and let what's most important for me to focus on in this particular area come up and then I'm pretty good at putting that on top of the list and attending to it.

Change leaders with the highest mindfulness scores were more likely to seek professional advice to assist them in leading the change initiative. Some leaders had actual professionals that they hired to assist them, such as mentors, consultants and coaches, while others turned to trusted advisors. Violet said:

Frankly, my strength is to always know what I don't know and to reach out and get information. . . . Being clear in your own head, but when there's so many moving parts and things are going so quickly, to always have those trusted advisors who frankly maybe shouldn't be part of the organization. You've got people to rely on that you can bounce things off of without [them] being people [who] are directly impacted. . . . When there [was] ambiguity and a variety of opinions and [I needed to] think about how . . . to handle something, it was a good way for me to work.

Terence commented that:

Transformational change is hard and it can be pretty stressful, particularly if you get caught up in the minutia of the day or the problem of the day. . . . You're feeling like you as the leader are outside your comfort zone and you have questions that maybe you can't answer and you feel that you should be able to answer those. . . . Finding a mentor, or someone you can talk to, helps . . . someone who's been through similar kinds of things in the past.

Susan sought assistance this way:

In [my current transformational change], I've brought in an HR consultant to support a bit more. We're upgrading our HR processes as we go through this so this gives a nice amount of attention to the culture and the people part. . . . Also, I work from home. The office is quite virtual. . . . I don't really have colleagues to talk to, so I call up supporters to talk things through . . . if I'm feeling unsure. I ask for help, share the problem. . . . I'm fine with those kinds of conversations.

There was only one leader in the group with the lowest mindfulness scores who referenced seeking advice and that was Donal, who stated:

I relied on others who were trusted advisors. I reached out to those who had more knowledge in the area than I did. Individuals that I felt had good grasp of the environment.

Change leaders with the lowest mindfulness scores listed emotional support as one way that they deal with ambiguity. This showed up for them as venting and otherwise getting support from trusted friends and advisors outside of their organizations. It appears that they were seeking external support for dealing with the emotional discomfort that accompanies ambiguity, in addition to or perhaps instead of seeking some sort of action plan or advice to deal with the circumstances that produced the ambiguity. Elizabeth said that she:

Really had to lean on trusted friends and advisors just to have my emotional breakdowns because it was really, really hard. But that helped me keep getting through it. I just had to acknowledge that I was in a really bad place a lot of the time, and then part of that journey was learning that that was OK, and then trusting other people. I had my trusted group I could meltdown with.

Maureen discussed why she needed emotional support and how she got it:

I dealt with it with good strong relationships. . . . [With] the level of passion, how deep I dug, to lead that [transformational change effort], I took my gas tank down below zero and I'm still refilling it. If you [ask] my husband, I'm a total worrier. I'm just churning, and I'm playing it over [in my] head. I think the more it went on, the more stress it was . . . [and] the more exhausted I became. I kept the front up for others for the most part, but I absorbed a lot on the inside. . . . I had a very, very strong VP of Ops who was my co-pilot the entire time, and I mean we literally text messaged, we talked twice a day, and in the fall . . . I hit a point where I said, "I literally can't do this. I literally can't get us there. The toll. I can't get through this week. I can't get through this month." He was at my side [the



entire time]. That core team . . . [and] that tone that we set at the beginning, that high trust, and having those relationships absolutely got me through.

Change leaders with the highest mindfulness scores were more likely to exercise an agile, action-oriented approach when coping with ambiguity. Typically this took the form of focused execution. Strategies for accomplishing this included identifying key needs and taking action, focusing on what works versus theoretical approaches and frameworks, staying flexible, creating leverage points and adapting throughout the change process.

Eileen gave an example of this from her experience:

So I find myself, when there's ambiguity, looking around and identifying where there are gaps and needs for the organization as a whole and then just taking the initiative [to] fill those gaps and do the right thing for the company and the customers. That's what helps me get through ambiguity too. I don't let myself sit still. I'm always finding something to do that to me is meaningful, and hopefully I am a good enough judge of what is going to be meaningful and worthwhile that it's also having a positive impact when I'm finding those gaps and taking action around it.

Violet also took an action-oriented approach:

I was very focused on execution because when I got involved it was the last 10 months of when it needed to be up and running. [Things were moving] very fast. I could be very decisive because I had a lot of authority [due to the large size of the deal].

Terence approached it this way:

To work your way through change . . . [is] not an end in itself, it's a process. To work your way through that knot, you have to be willing to change and develop yourself as well as change and develop others.

When it comes to exercising courageous and bold leadership, change leaders with the lowest overall mindfulness scores were more likely to speak about forwarding the action using their attitudes as a catalyst.

Henry outlined what he thinks it takes:

It's really a matter of choice when there's organizational upheaval what's going to be your comfort. [For me it's] attitude. Going in with this "whatever it is I'm going to embrace it" attitude. Whatever this change is, I'm going to embrace it and make the best of it and if it's an untenable situation after a period of time, I'll look for another opportunity.

Maureen's approach was:

How do I get there? What do I need to be? That's who I am, how I tick. I'm an all-in person . . . who leads . . . with passion. So many folks, when they run a project like this, they run it off of tasks and logic and head and I don't see that [approach as one that will have you] successfully winning hearts at a level that you need to. Whether it's customers' hearts or employees' hearts, it's at an emotional level. In order to lead at that emotional level, the only way I know how to do it is to be all in. [When] I look at folks around me, some of the senior leaders . . . are more objective. They're less passionate. They're steadier. I don't fundamentally believe they could have led it because you [need to have] a level of passion [in order to successfully lead transformational change].

**Helping others to deal with ambiguity.** In examining the differences in change leadership strategies oriented towards helping others to deal with the ambiguity associated with transformational organizational change, there were very few differences between the change leaders with the highest scores on the Five Factors Mindfulness Questionnaire and those who scored the lowest (see Table 20).

**Table 20**

***Change Leadership Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity: High Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners***

Guidance or Expertise Provided	Low (N = 4)	High (N = 4)
Articulated vision and direction	2	2
Demonstrated confident, strong change leadership	1	1
Execute a coordinated, well-planned effort	2	1
Secured early wins to build confidence and sense of success	0	1
Normalized and capitalized on ambiguity	0	2

The one area where a difference was seen was in the area of normalizing and capitalizing on ambiguity. The leaders with the higher mindfulness scores tended to reframe ambiguity for their followers to take away any bad or negative connotations and

instead looked at it as a way of leveraging the ambiguity to move things forward. Instead of calling it ambiguity, they looked at it with curiosity, flexibility and an open mind; then they used that mindset to influence people who are involved in the change effort.

This is how Violet described how she did this:

For me the ambiguity worked in my favor in the sense of I could use it to influence people. [I would say things like] “We don’t know how this is going to play out but we want to do “X.” We’re thinking this might work the best right now.”

Terence leverages ambiguity this way:

Rather than ambiguity it’s almost more curiosity or flexibility or an open mind. There’s something about ambiguity that feels bad as a concept. When you say ambiguity, ambiguity doesn’t sound good. By [being up] front with [the fact that there will be ambiguity], as long as you don’t go overboard and make people feel as if they’ve got no certainty in where they’re going, you can actually bring people on more effectively because it shows that you’re willing to listen and say, “You’re part of this process. I want your feedback and your input as we work through this change.” It’s a cool part of being successful in transformation.

**Communications as a way to help others deal with ambiguity.** Many of the change leaders involved in this research study stated they use communication strategies to help their constituents handle the ambiguity (and reactions to that ambiguity) during transformational change. In comparing the four change leaders with the highest mindfulness score with the four who had the lowest scores, what is notable is the leaders with the highest mindfulness used multiple communication techniques versus those with the lowest mindfulness scores who used only one technique (see Table 21).

The go-to technique for the leaders with the lowest mindfulness scores was one-on-one meetings and informal dialogues.

Here is how Henry handled this:

I was doing literally about 150 one-on-ones every month with my 10 direct reports and their 2 team leads underneath them and then [talking with] anybody who wanted to chat with me. I just tried to keep that dialogue recurring because

it's just that. It's dialogue. If it's fractured, if it's irregular, I find it also erodes that trust. It is like [an] old shoe [that] is going to fit. You know that you've got time with your manager every Friday at 10:00 and if you don't feel comfortable talking about it right now you can save it for that moment.

**Table 21**

***Communication Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity: High Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners***

Communication Strategy	Low (N = 4)	High (N = 4)
Created and honored a communication plan	1	0
Facilitated communication up and down organization	0	1
Purpose and Contents of Communication		
Strategic goals and how change activities and employees' work connect to it	0	1
Set expectations for the future	0	1
Induce employees' support for change	1	1
Techniques		
Held one-on-one meetings and informal dialogues	2	3
Used multiple modalities to expand reach	0	3
Communicated repeatedly	0	1
Used metaphors and other approaches to promote understanding	0	1

Donal made a point of dialoging about the change initiative with constituents:

It required a lot of discussion and soul-searching and conversation. It required a lot more . . . consensus-building.

In addition to meetings and dialogues, the participants with the highest mindfulness scores used multiple modalities to expand their reach, repeated communications, and tended to employ the use of metaphors and other approaches to promote understanding. In discussing the multiple communication modalities they employed to get their messages out, the higher mindfulness participants stated they communicate in all different formats and adapt the style/message of their communications according to their audiences. They also mentioned they keep their written communications very simple – clear, concise and straightforward, then follow up

those communications with meetings and individual discussions. Susan uses “communication in all different formats” to distribute important messages related to transformational change efforts.

Violet uses the following varied strategies for communications in order to reach everyone:

My strategy and techniques were talking and writing. It’s really simple and it’s a multi-pronged approach under the same premise which is just communication. . . . First, email: well written, clear, concise, and very straightforward. Not sentences. Bullets. Things people can read clearly. And then follow up with group meetings and then follow up with individual meetings. I made myself available to everyone and then I proactively scheduled time and worked [the plan]. I recognized that people absorb information in different ways and you’ve got to give them some attention and time if you want them to engage with you the way you’d like them to engage.

Terence adapts his style of communication and message according to the audience:

I think that depends on the type of person that you’re dealing with, in terms of what [the message] looks like, so if you’re presenting to the CFO, then he or she might need to see the financial impacts to get comfortable in dealing with all that change. If you are presenting to the head of HR then they might need to understand more [of] the people implications. You have to flex your style depending on the audience.

**Capacity building strategies for dealing with ambiguity.** When it comes to building capacity in others that will help them to better deal with the ambiguity associated with transformational organizational change, the most striking differences between participants with the highest mindfulness scores versus those with the lowest scores were in how willing they seemed to be to both involve employees in the change process and to change up the composition of the teams involved. This was a practice that doesn’t seem to be [much] used by the leaders with the lowest scores on the mindfulness questionnaire (see Table 22).

Table 22

*Capacity Building Strategies to Help Others Deal with Ambiguity: High Mindfulness v. Low Mindfulness Practitioners*

Capacity Building Strategy	Low (N = 4)	High (N = 4)
Determined who would be involved and how	1	3
Involved employees in the change	0	3
Changed team composition as needed	0	2
Clarified roles and responsibilities	1	0
Addressed their emotions and experiences	2	3
Sought to understand them, show empathy, and offer support	2	3
Normalize the anxiety and distress and help people find inner resilience	0	1
Provided targeted guidance	2	1
Coached others how to deal with the change	2	1
Provided education and tools	1	0

The leaders with the highest mindfulness scores described how they try to make it fun for people to engage in the change process. One way they do this is by bringing in food and creating social engagement among the team members. Others with high mindfulness scores said they see themselves as “dot connectors” in order to create engagement and involve the right employees in the change. They said they also look to leverage people’s natural strengths as they engage them in the change process. These leaders seem to be adaptable as things progress, by continuing to reassess the composition of their teams and being willing to bring in additional support as needed.

Violet emphasized the need to incorporate the lighter side into transformational change:

[It’s about] trying to have some fun with it . . . [by] having fun, bringing in food, socializing where you can. Trying to take the pressure off people. You’re adding workload, or different workload; workload that is less clear and crisp, more ambiguous, [that] also feels [like] more pressure [to them]. To the extent that you can have some fun and make things just a little less stressful, that would be . . . a technique [I would use].

Eileen focuses on getting people involved in the change:

In a lot of ways I think of myself as a dot connector. I'm constantly, without even realizing it, assessing what is happening around me and creating those connective tissues to understand what is happening holistically. Then I'm able to, no matter who it is, find ways to get them engaged in some way. I just make sure that there is room to have fun. People have fun when they're contributing and when they're making a difference and part of [encouraging] that [is about] making things up as I go, just reading all the signs and figuring out what's going to work best.

In discussing how to deal with the complexities associated with people, including who needs to stay and who needs to go as a result of the transformational change as well as what additional support is needed on the team to help make the change happen, Violet stated that:

The only thing that's a negative . . . is the emotional engagement with the people who are struggling, who don't have mindfulness and who aren't thinking like you are. You risk not factoring them in, but on the other hand you don't want to factor them in! Their emotional reaction to what's happening might not be productive, or frankly strategic or even emotionally mature. But, if there's some feedback from them that can help you change what you do, [it's helpful]. I've really thought about that since I left [that company] because we were moving so fast; where did I maybe miss feedback or where did I focus on it too much and let those individuals [with their] own agendas, own immaturity, own anxieties, detract me from the mission? It's a really tough needle to thread.

### **Summary**

This chapter reported the results of the study. It provided an overview of findings and themes, including demographic characteristics of study participants, how ambiguity is experienced by participants in a transformational organizational change, strategies used by experienced change leaders to manage and cope with that ambiguity for themselves and others, and the results of the Five Facets Mindfulness Questionnaire that was administered to each of the participants. The chapter closed with a comparison of how the four most mindful and four least mindful experienced change leaders employed the ambiguity-management strategies mentioned above. Finally, the use of mindfulness

during transformational organizational change was discussed. The next chapter will provide a discussion of the results.



## Chapter 5

### Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine how experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and to determine whether mindfulness helps them do that. The research questions were:

1. How does ambiguity during transformational organizational change affect participants in that change?
2. What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change?
3. In what ways might mindfulness help experienced change leaders during transformational organizational change?
4. Do change leaders with high levels of mindfulness deal with ambiguity differently than low mindfulness change leaders?

This chapter provides a discussion of the results. Conclusions based on the findings are presented first, followed by recommendations for change practitioners and their organizations. Limitations of the study are then acknowledged and suggestions for continued research are outlined.

### Conclusions

This section offers an interpretation of the data gathered during this study and relates the findings to key themes found in the research literature. Conclusions were drawn for each of the research questions examined in this study and the implications of these are tied back to the research.

#### **Impact of ambiguity on transformational organizational change participants.**

The study findings indicated that practitioners felt various reactions to ambiguity, with roughly one-third feeling high anxiety, nearly half having no strong reaction, and roughly one out of five feeling energized. These results are partially in agreement with Denis et

al. (1996) who found in their case study of strategic change in a hospital setting that ambiguity was deeply unsettling and painful for all parties involved because it requires substantial shifts in prevailing mindsets. The discrepant results from the present study that some change leaders either had no reaction or actually felt energized by the ambiguity may represent an area for further research to understand. Change practitioners who are experiencing high anxiety and discomfort when faced with ambiguity may have difficulty leading others through transformational change. It would therefore be advisable for them to explore ways to become more comfortable with ambiguity to relieve its effects.

Although findings suggested that some employees have behavioral reactions when faced with ambiguity, most change leaders stated that ambiguity primarily affects employees mentally and emotionally in the form of high anxiety and distress or uncertainty. These findings are consistent with those by another study that found adverse reactions by employees during large scale organizational change are more likely to be around escaping the situation (“escape coping strategies”) as opposed to looking at the change itself negatively and acting out as a result of that (Fugate et al., 2008, p. 31). The results of the present and past studies suggest that the anxiety, distress, and sense of not knowing that employees feel during ambiguity can make it difficult for them to take productive action that supports the change strategy.

Few findings were generated relative to the impact of ambiguity on the organization and other organizational stakeholders. From what was learned in the present study, the report that some senior leaders actively worked against the change, while somewhat surprising, is consistent with a political view of organization change and the potential clashing of interests therein (Morgan, 2006).

**Strategies and techniques used by experienced change leaders to manage ambiguity.** According to Cameron (2008), leaders lose their normal reference points during transformational organizational change and must develop ways of rationalizing the attendant ambiguity. Findings of the present study suggest that experienced change leaders use three primary strategies for dealing with ambiguity. The first is personal coping strategies including self-awareness and self-care, which help them get comfortable with ambiguity and normalize the associated anxiety and distress. Similarly, Waldman et al. (2008) stated that an effective leader must be able to self-regulate their own emotions and Anderson and Ackerman-Anderson (2010) associated transformational change success with leaders' abilities to engage in personal introspection. Nicolaidis and Katsaros (2011) stated that a leader's ability to manage the emotions they feel towards the ambiguity during change will determine if a particular change effort will be successful or not. The importance of maintaining one's "physical, psychological and social life" in order to have capacity to lead in highly ambiguous situations is supported by McCann and Selsky (2012, p. 14).

Given the near certainty of anxiety and distress when leading transformational change, this study suggests that change leaders should adopt and/or maintain daily personal coping strategies focused on self-awareness and self-care so they can remain steady when ambiguity and uncertainty arise. Mindfulness has been found to be a way for building the capability of emotional regulation (Fogarty et al., 2015; Hülshager et al., 2013; Shapiro, Carlson, Astin, & Freedman, 2006). The diminished emotional regulation when mindfulness is relatively low was demonstrated in the current study by the "venting" described by low mindfulness respondents. Recommended practices to increase mindfulness include physical exercise, yoga, meditation or other forms of contemplation,

walks outside in nature, or any other practice that creates the feeling of relaxation and centeredness for the leader. It is important to undertake these practices ahead of time in order to develop a level of self-awareness before entering a stressful change situation.

Change leaders also take project-level actions at the beginning of a transformational change to manage their anxiety. These include clarifying the goals and direction of the change for themselves, securing executive support for their actions as change leader, and pulling together a strong team to help them execute the change strategy. Nadler and Tushman (1990) call these *instrumental skills*. Miller (2002) states that while adaptability is the hallmark of good leaders, they must also depend on self-discipline to employ an effective framework for implementing the change. To successfully lead transformational change leaders must establish North star type of guidance system for themselves, which means being clear on what the change effort is supposed to achieve and aligning with leadership and other stakeholders to make it happen.

The third strategy involves seeking ongoing guidance and support from a variety of sources, including professional advice and emotional support from trusted others. McCann and Selsky (2012) stated that having positive and supportive relationships are key when ambiguous conditions demand the most from a change leader. Change leaders should create strong support systems for themselves personally, particularly when these include trusted advisors (preferably not involved in the change project) to act as sounding boards throughout the transformational change process.

Transformational change leaders also employ secondary strategies to mitigate ambiguity for themselves. They take an agile and action-oriented approach, exercise courageous and bold leadership, and trust the process and the tools. According to

McCann and Selsky (2012), agility and resilience are necessary for leaders to be able to manage successfully during times of rapid and even disruptive change. According to Miller (2002), the most successful change initiatives are driven by leaders who take on accomplishing the goals of the change as their own personal mission.

It is important to note that all these strategies (both primary and secondary) may be construed as basic best practices for leading change. However, in the midst of ambiguity change leaders seem to employ these practices and techniques with the very specific intention to mitigate their own reactions to ambiguity.

To help others manage and deal with ambiguity, the experienced change leaders in this study said they repeatedly articulate the vision and direction of the change and demonstrate confident, strong change leadership to promote the success of their transformational change initiatives. In other words, participants in a transformational change seem to handle ambiguity best when they understand the reasons for the change and the vision of where the organization intends to be after the change process is complete (Kotter, 1995). It is important, therefore, for the transformational change leader to articulate these throughout the change process. Higgs and Rowland (2011) found that successful change leaders keep themselves and their teams focused and aligned on the strategic vision for a particular change initiative and ensure that teams keep this vision in mind when making their execution plans. Wren and Dulewicz (2005) found that the most successful change leaders paint a clear picture as to what life looks like after the change and rated this as a key activity for leading a successful change effort.

One way of demonstrating strong and confident change leadership is by creating and honoring a communication plan. It is important to use a variety of communication techniques to get the message out, including one-on-one meetings, informal dialogues,

and multiple modalities to expand reach. Repetitious communications, metaphors, and other approaches to promote understanding seem to help others to manage the ambiguity and uncertainty that come up during transformational change. Gill (2003) says that no or poor communication as well as unclear or inconsistent messaging will cause those involved in a change process to speculate and foment rumors. This can undermine morale and reduce organization members' commitment to carry out the change process. Wren and Dulewicz state that "managing resources, engaging communication and empowerment (are) the three dimensions of leadership that exert the strongest influence on the success of change" (p. 308). According to Kotter (1996), effective communication of a transformational vision includes "simplicity; metaphor, analogy and example; multiple forums; repetition; leadership by example; explanation of seeming inconsistencies; and give-and-take" (p. 90).

Finally, it is important to address the personal needs of change participants by paying attention to who is involved and how, allowing space for people's emotional responses to ambiguity during change and providing targeted guidance to help others to deal with the change process. According to Nicolaidis and Katsoros (2011), people who have strong emotional competence are better at adapting to conditions of ambiguity.

**Uses of mindfulness for managing ambiguity during transformational organizational change.** The study findings indicate that there are three main effects of mindfulness on change leaders: mindfulness enhances the leader's ability to interact with others, helps the leader to maintain their perspective, and enhances the leader's ability to attune with others' emotional states.

Sauer and Kohls (2011) similarly stated that "mindfulness fosters resilience toward unpleasant events" (p. 302). Roche et al. (2014) confirmed that mindfulness,

among other things, is a psychological resource that is able to create well-being that managers and entrepreneurs can use to help mitigate the effects of stress and anxiety of “complex, challenging, and pressure-packed” situations (p. 484). They also stated that their findings had implications for leader development. Higgs and Rowland (2011) determined that the three particular qualities exhibited by the most successful change leaders are: (a) demonstrating high degrees of self-awareness, (b) remaining present in the moment and attuned to what comes up, and (c) staying in touch with the bigger picture and the strategic vision for the change and keeping change processes connected to that vision.

Whether they call it mindfulness or not, it seems that most of the experienced change leaders who participated in this study do use mindfulness to manage and deal with ambiguity during transformational organizational change as evidenced by their own self-reporting on this subject. Based on the results of this study, the mindfulness of the leader seems to have some effect on others in a way that enhances the execution of the transformational change process. The change leader’s mindfulness bolsters others’ confidence, both in the leader and in the change process, according to the participants in this research study. It was also reported to enhance the perception of the change agent’s integrity and trustworthiness.

In the study conducted by Roche et al. (2014), the researchers found the benefits of mindfulness enhance a leader’s well-being and that this well-being “infiltrated and impacts followers” (p. 485). Research has also found that the level of positivity (or positive psychological capital, also called PsyCap) exhibited by the global leaders does seem to positively affect followers, even when there was physical distance between the leader and the follower (Story, Youssef, Luthans, Barbuto, & Bovaird, 2013).

It seems that the mindfulness of a transformational change leader has a positive effect on their followers. Therefore, attempts should be made to help change leaders to develop and/or improve their level of mindfulness in order to improve their ability to lead transformational change.

A majority of the participating experienced change leaders indicated that they believe that mindfulness training would be useful for change leaders. A smaller number suggested it would be best if the mindfulness training were applied to the specific business situation and/or needs. Several participants felt that it would be imperative that the training be given only to those who want it. They felt no one should be forced into taking mindfulness training, which indeed would not work anyway.

Carroll (2011) pointed out that companies such as Raytheon, Proctor & Gamble, Unilever, Nortel Networks, Comcast, and many law firms have offered their employees classes in mindfulness meditation. Additionally,

Executives such as Bill Ford Jr., the chairman of Ford Motor Company; Michael Stephen, the former chairman of Aetna International; Robert Shapiro, the ex-CEO of Monsanto; and Michael Rennie, the managing partner of McKinsey, meditate and consider such a practice beneficial to running a corporation. (p. 2)

**Comparison of ambiguity strategies used by high-mindfulness and low-mindfulness change leaders.** In this study, comparisons were made between the four change leaders with the highest total FFMQ scores and the four with the lowest total FFMQ scores to compare how each group copes with ambiguity for themselves and how they help others to deal with ambiguity during transformational change.

Based on these leaders' interview responses, mindful change leaders are more likely to practice self-awareness and self-care as coping mechanisms for themselves when faced with ambiguity during transformational organizational change. They are also



more likely to seek professional advice and assistance when leading transformational change than are leaders who scored lowest on the FFMQ. Finally, according to the study findings, leaders who scored highest on the FFMQ were more likely to exercise an agile, action-oriented approach to leading change. At the same time, it is important to acknowledge that the differences may not be fully attributable to their level of mindfulness. Nevertheless, these findings suggest that leaders should find some personal practices that help them to develop self-awareness and take care of their own well-being in order to be even more effective at leading transformational organizational change. It would seem that mindfulness does help a change leader to both embrace and to capitalize on ambiguity, and therefore an attempt to cultivate mindfulness in change leaders should also be made.

### **Recommendations**

Two primary recommendations are offered based on the present research. First, the study findings emphasized that ambiguity is a natural part of transformational and other change efforts and that such ambiguity can affect change leaders to significant and negative degrees. Therefore, the first recommendation of this study is to design ambiguity exposure and management training for change leaders. Although a few of the experienced change leaders who participated in this study were energized by their experience of ambiguity during transformational change, most admitted they felt anxiety, distress, and discomfort when faced with ambiguity. Transformational change leaders should find ways to relieve their stress and anxiety when encountering ambiguity. As they enhance their own ability to thrive during ambiguity and uncertainty, they may help other change participants do the same.

One way to do this that seems promising based on the findings of this study and on past research is to incorporate mindfulness practices into the self-care tools that leaders use to develop a sense of calm presence in the face of ambiguity. The ambiguity exposure and management training recommended here could be accomplished through a series of offerings to help internal and external change leaders get comfortable with ambiguity and reduce its effects. These offerings could include articles, workshops, presentations, best practices and techniques. In these programs, it would be important to raise awareness among leaders of transformational change around the types of personal practices they can employ to manage and mitigate their reactions to the ambiguity and uncertainty that arises during transformational change. Change leaders would also benefit from education on the project level actions they could undertake in order to mitigate their own ambiguity. Finally, the programs would educate change leaders on the importance of creating support systems for themselves as a way of dealing with their own responses to ambiguity during transformational change.

The second recommendation is to educate employees and their organizations about the likelihood of ambiguity and what that experience will be like. According to the findings of this study, a good portion of an organization's membership, including senior leaders, were negatively affected by ambiguity and this tended to have deleterious effects on the outcomes of the transformational change. Therefore, it also would be valuable to design ambiguity exposure and management training for employees. Like the recommendations for change leaders, this would be a series of offerings to help employees get comfortable with ambiguity during change and reduce its effects. These could include workshops, presentations, and other types of interventions that help employees relieve stress and anxiety and become more comfortable with ambiguity.

Mindfulness training could also be incorporated through a series of offerings (workshops, presentations, and interventions) to help employees to develop mindfulness. It is also important to raise awareness among companies to expect adverse reactions in employees who are faced with ambiguity and uncertainty during change, and that they should do something about this if they want a better, faster result for their transformational change initiatives. Indeed, given the rapid pace of change in today's world, building capacity to deal with ambiguity and uncertainty into employees and change leaders should have a positive effect on all business efforts.

### **Limitations**

Five limitations affected the study and should be acknowledged. First, there is the potential for self-report bias by the change leaders. It is possible that their interpretations were inaccurate or incorrect in some way. For example, they might have distorted memories about their own and others' experiences of ambiguity. Their experience of ambiguity in the moment may not have been energizing, but when the project turned out well, all memories of that project may have become positive. They also may have either overstated or understated positive (or negative) reactions within themselves or others. In addition, research participants may have wanted to look good or perhaps be helpful to the researcher, which may have colored their responses (Donaldson & Grant-Vallone, 2002). Donaldson and Grant-Vallone also stated that while the bias introduced by self-reporting is very common in organizational behavior research it is also very difficult to mitigate. One way to counter it might be to have multiple sources of data.

Second, the mindfulness instrument that was used to measure the level of mindfulness in each of the leaders may not have accurately represented the degree of mindfulness of the participants in this study. As mentioned in Chapter 2, there are

currently no sure-fire ways to measure mindfulness. There have been suggestions that a total FFMQ mindfulness score should not be used to measure overall mindfulness (Van Dam, Hobkirk, Danoff-Burg, & Earleywine, 2012). This is because there can be a difference in the way that meditators versus non-meditators answer the FFMQ questions (Baer, Samuel, & Lykins, 2011). In an email to the researcher Professor Baer, who led the team who developed the FFMQ, suggested that a using total FFMQ score might be misleading in non-meditators because the Observing scale on the FFMQ often behaves differently in non-meditators versus meditators. She suggested that if Observe is not correlated with the other facets in the study sample, or is negatively correlated with any of them, a total score that omits Observe would be a better way to go. Another way to prevent this limitation could have been to use another mindfulness instrument, although as mentioned above, this may not have been advantageous until better measures of mindfulness have been developed through research.

Another limitation affecting this study is the third variable problem. This happens when there is some other (third) variable that influences the relationship between two variables that are being measured in a research study. In the present study, mindfulness may not be the attribute that helped the leaders to maintain their perspective and attune with others' emotional states. Instead, their ability to do so might have been due to some other factor related to the leader's state of well-being. This is a difficult problem to overcome because we are studying people and there are myriad influences that affect them at any given moment. One way to counter the third variable problem would be to factor in any obvious confounding variables in the research planning process.

The fourth limitation affecting this study is that the sample size was relatively small and may not be representative of the broader population of experienced change

leaders. The sample also was a convenience sample drawn from the researcher's extended network. To resolve this problem, a larger sample size should be adopted with a more randomized selection approach that covers a wider range of change leaders from a variety of industries and geographies.

Finally, the change leaders' responses to ambiguity may have been due to personal factors, such as an anxiety disorder, anxiety medications, personal chaos, or a long-term meditative practice. These may not be things that the participant would want the researcher to know, or perhaps they did not think they were relevant to mention at the time of the interview. This would cause the results to be skewed away from the real factors that were affecting the leader's experience of ambiguity and how they dealt with it. In a future study, the researcher could specifically ask about these types of factors in a demographic questionnaire or during the interview.

### **Suggestions for Research**

Four suggestions for research are advised based on the results of the present study. First, the study should be repeated using alternate methods to validate and deepen the results. There are a number of ways to do this. A sequential mixed methods study that has an anonymous survey portion is recommended to gauge the representativeness of the interview findings. For the qualitative research, a real-time case study could be conducted to allow for more objective data to be gathered that would help to confirm the presence and/or degree of a leader's mindfulness. This could include heart rate, blood pressure, fMRI studies, observations, and other data. Another option would be to do research with employees directly to determine how ambiguity affects them, rather than relying on self-report data from the change leaders.

Additionally, it would be advisable to increase the sample size and extend participant recruiting beyond a convenience sample. This would provide an opportunity to do further research on which personal coping strategies are the most effective for leaders across a larger sample size and to examine the impact of change ambiguity in organizations and on leaders. The study could be repeated using other mindfulness scales to determine total mindfulness. The impact of mindfulness on a leader's ability to lead could also be studied through a cultural lens to see if the benefits of mindfulness have a cultural context. All of these are suggested as ways to extend the findings of this study across a broader sample and, at the same time, to help resolve the impacts of the limitations of the study that were previously mentioned.

The second suggestion for further research is to identify and test various tools that change leaders might use to help themselves and others deal with ambiguity and uncertainty during transformational organizational change. The results of such a study could extend what was found in the present study. More research on a wider sample of change practitioners who handle ambiguity well would generate a better understanding of what personal coping strategies they use to do so. The findings of this type of study would be highly beneficial for people and organizations in today's rapidly changing world.

A third suggested area for research is to gather data about possible confounding variables (e.g., meditative practice, medications, anxiety disorders) and explore what moderating variables might be affecting the change leaders' reactions to ambiguity. It would also be useful to research why some transformational change leaders have either no reaction to or feel energized by ambiguity. Research in this area would help us to see if there is a more comprehensive set of actions that might be taken by change leaders to

help themselves and others to have a more positive and productive response to ambiguity when it comes up during a change process.

Finally, more investigation needs to be done to determine how valuable it might be to provide mindfulness interventions as a way of preparing leaders to be resilient in the face of the ambiguity inherent in transformational change. Further research could examine the effects of a leader's mindfulness on their followers. One way to study this would be to conduct interviews with the followers of a mindful leader to determine the effect that leader's mindfulness has on his or her team.

### **Summary**

In today's business world, dynamic changes caused by rapidly shifting environmental conditions are causing greater need for organizations to undergo transformational organizational change and with greater frequency (Callan, 1993; Cameron, 2008; Gioia et al., 2012; Puleo, 2011; Roche et al., 2014; Sethi, 2009). The present study examined how experienced change leaders manage and cope with ambiguity during transformational organizational change and whether mindfulness helps them do that. A simultaneous mixed-method design was used, wherein 19 experienced change leaders completed a mindfulness assessment and underwent an interview regarding the effects of ambiguity on participants in transformational organizational change, the strategies and techniques they use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others, and how mindfulness might aid in that effort.

Study findings indicated that practitioners felt various reactions to ambiguity and employees generally experience negative mental and emotional reactions. Change leaders use three primary strategies for dealing with ambiguity: personal coping strategies, initial project-level actions, and seeking ongoing guidance and support. They also take an agile

and action-oriented approach, exercise courageous and bold leadership, and trust the process and the tools. To help others manage and deal with ambiguity, experienced change leaders repeatedly articulate the vision and direction of the change and demonstrate confident, strong change leadership to promote the success of their transformational change initiatives. Study findings indicate there are three main effects of mindfulness on change leaders: mindfulness enhances the leader's ability to interact with others, helps the leader to maintain their perspective, and enhances the leader's ability to attune with others' emotional states. Based on the present study findings, mindful change leaders are more likely to practice self-awareness and self-care as ambiguity coping mechanisms, seek professional advice and assistance, and exercise an agile, action-oriented approach to leading change.

Based on these findings, ambiguity exposure and management training is recommended for change leaders. Employees and their organizations also need to be educated about the likelihood of ambiguity and what that experience will be like when embarking on transformational organizational change. Additional research is recommended to build on the present study, including repeating the study using alternate methods to validate and deepen the results, identifying and testing various tools that change leaders use to manage ambiguity and uncertainty during transformational organizational change, examining the role of confounding variables, and studying the effects of mindfulness interventions for change leaders.



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## Appendix A: Request for Nominees

Dear (referrer name),

Do you know senior leaders who have led transformational organizational change? Are you one yourself?

(Use one of the three openings below)

- Short personal hello to people I know.
- We have not met but we have X in our common network and he/she suggested I reach out to you.
- I discovered the work you have been doing during the course of my proposed study, which is about dealing with ambiguity during transformational organizational change.

I am writing to ask for your help in referring experienced change leaders to participate in my Masters Thesis research study. I am looking to discover what strategies, techniques and tactics experienced change leaders use to manage and deal with ambiguity during transformational organizational change.

In this study, change leadership includes all three of the characteristics listed below:

- Holding a senior position in an organization (director or above) OR being an external consultant to senior leadership;
- Playing a leadership role in an organizational change initiative, either as a team leader (with direct reports) AND/OR as a change leader (individual contributor or a team leader);
- Carrying out strategic tasks during the change initiative:
  - Helping envision and determine the business case for a change initiative AND/OR;
  - Helping engage organization members in executing the change.

The dynamics of today's business environments frequently require transformational organizational change. Transformational organizational change involves a radical shift of strategy, structure, systems, processes or technology where the . . .

- Organization must start working on the change process before the final outcome is fully known and defined (i.e., the final outcome is emergent as a result of the change process);
- Magnitude and/or breadth of the organizational change is so significant that a shift of culture, behavior and mindset is required to implement the change successfully and sustain it over time;
- Change is both long-term and organization-wide;
- Organization must reorganize and/or significantly change the way it does business.

Examples of transformational change initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Changing an organization's structure from a traditional hierarchy into self-directing teams;
- Re-engineering business processes across an entire organization;
- Overcoming a business crisis by significantly changing business processes;
- Making radical changes to a company's products, services and/or go-to-market strategy.

Transformational change creates a high degree of uncertainty for members of the organization who participate in the change effort, which can be unsettling and anxiety provoking for all concerned.

### **What would be entailed for the participant change leader?**

If a person you refer chooses to volunteer to participate in this study, they will be asked to answer some general demographic questions (for example, size of their current organization, their title, their experience leading transformational organizational change, etc.) and to take an online questionnaire that examines their general approach to life. All this should take approximately twenty minutes to complete. A sub-group of participants will be asked for a follow-up telephone interview that will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes.

### **My request of you:**

If your professional network includes anyone who might have the qualifications listed above, please send their name and email address to me at [awylson@gmail.com](mailto:awylson@gmail.com). You may also forward this email to friends and colleagues who you think may be able to assist with a referral for this study. Self-referrals are also welcome – I would love to include you in my study if you think it fits.

Thank you in advance for your participation and for your help with my research project. I would be happy to share the results of my study if you are interested.

Sincerely,

Avonlie Wylson

Pepperdine University MSOD Candidate (August 2015)

## **Appendix B: Online Participant Consent Form**

### Consent to Participate in a Research Study

**TITLE OF THE STUDY:** Dealing With Ambiguity During Transformational Organizational Change

**RESEARCHER'S NAME AND AFFILIATION:** Avonlie Wylson, current graduate student at the Graziadio School of Business, Pepperdine University, Malibu, CA.

**PURPOSE:** This research is attempting to determine what strategies, techniques and tactics that experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change. All research conducted is in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Science in Organization Development.

**PROCEDURES:** If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to answer some general demographic questions (for example, size of your current organization, your title, your experience leading transformational organizational change, etc.) and to take an online questionnaire. All this should take approximately twenty minutes to complete. A sub sample of participants will be asked for a follow-up interview that will take approximately 30 to 45 minutes. If you participate in an interview, you will be asked questions about your experiences relating to transformational organizational change and the techniques you use for dealing with ambiguity, which can also be thought of as unforeseen issues that arise, for yourself and others within your organization. The researcher will be taking notes and recording the interview. All tape recordings will be stored in a secure place during the research and then destroyed. No names will be used to identify anyone who takes part in the interviews. Your responses will be pooled with others and summarized only in an attempt to see themes, trends, and/or patterns. Only summarized information will be reported. No comments will be attributed to any individual.

**PARTICIPATION:** Participation in this study is voluntary. The researcher's class standing, grades, and/or job status will not be affected by refusal to participate or by withdrawal from this study. You may stop your participation in the study at any time and there are no potential risks associated with the study.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The results of this study may be published in the form of articles, a book, or a research report; however, you will not be identified by name. Only the researcher will have direct access to the data. Although the researcher will be collecting identifiable data about participants throughout the study, the confidentiality of individual records will be protected during and after the study. All steps will be taken to ensure the data remains confidential and uncompromised. Participant identities will be protected through the use of pseudonyms in the publication of results.

**QUESTIONS:** If you have any questions about this research, please do not hesitate to contact the researcher at [awylson@gmail.com](mailto:awylson@gmail.com) or at (858) 945-8156, or her supervising

professor Julie Chesley, Ph.D. at [julie.chesley@pepperdine.edu](mailto:julie.chesley@pepperdine.edu). There is a committee at Pepperdine University that works to protect your rights and welfare, and reviews all research with human volunteers. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, or if you would like to obtain information or offer input, you may contact the Chairman of the Institutional Review Board at Pepperdine University, Dr. Thema Bryant-Davis, at [GPSIRB@pepperdine.edu](mailto:GPSIRB@pepperdine.edu) or at 310-568-5753.

**CONSENT:** By completing this survey, you are acknowledging that you have read and understand what your participation entails and are consenting to participate in the study.

Do you wish to participate in this study?

- Yes
- No

(If yes, thank them for participating in the research study and then the online survey tool will present the “Awareness Survey”, which is the Five Factors Mindfulness Questionnaire, for them to complete).

(If no, thank them for their time and consideration in responding to the study invitation email).

## Appendix C: Demographic Questions

(To be inserted in the online survey between consent form and FFMQ questionnaire)

### Focus of this research study:

To understand the strategies, techniques and tactics used by experienced change leaders to manage and deal with ambiguity during transformational organizational change.

1. Please provide your name. Your name will only be used for the purposes of contacting you during the course of the research study. It will not be referenced in any way in the results of the study.
2. What is your gender?
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
3. What age category do you belong to?
  - a. 20 to 29 years
  - b. 30 to 39 years
  - c. 40 to 49 years
  - d. 50 to 59 years
  - e. 60 to 69 years
  - f. 70 years and above
4. What is the approximate size of the company you currently work for?
  - a. 1 to 99 employees
  - b. 100 to 999 employees
  - c. 1,000 to 9,999 employees
  - d. 10,000 to 49,999 employees
  - e. 50,000 or more employees
5. Please provide your title:
  - a. Director
  - b. Senior Director
  - c. Vice President / Senior Vice President
  - d. Senior Executive / Partner
  - e. Outside consultant hired as change leader
  - f. Other (please specify)

In this study, *change leadership* means:

- Holding a senior position such as
  - Holding a director position (or equivalent) or above in an organization
  - Being an external consultant to senior leadership
- Playing a leadership role in an organizational change initiative, such as
  - Exercising team leadership (having direct reports)
  - Exercising change leadership (being an individual contributor or a team leader)
- Carrying out strategic tasks
  - Helping envision and determine the business case for a change initiative AND/OR

- Helping engage organization members in executing the change
6. How many years of change leadership experience do you have?
    - a. 0 years
    - b. 1 to 5 years
    - c. 6 to 10 years
    - d. 11 to 15 years
    - e. 16 to 19 years
    - f. 20 years or more

### **Transformational Organizational Change:**

Involves a radical shift of an organization's strategy, structure, systems, operations, processes, products/services or technology where the . . .

- Organization must start working on the change process before the final outcome is fully known and defined; i.e., the final outcome is emergent as a result of the change process
- Magnitude and/or breadth of the organizational change is so significant that a shift of culture, behavior and mindset is required to implement the change successfully and sustain it over time
- Change is both long-term and organization-wide
- Organization must reorganize and/or significantly change the way it does business

Examples of transformational change initiatives include (but are not limited to):

- Changing an organization's structure from a traditional hierarchy into self-directing teams
- Re-engineering business processes
- Overcoming a business crisis by significantly changing business processes
- Making radical changes to a company's products, services and/or go-to-market strategy

7. In how many transformational organizational change initiatives have you played a change leadership role?
  - a. 0
  - b. 1 to 2
  - c. 3 to 5
  - d. 5 to 10
  - e. 11 or more
  
8. On average, what was the duration of the transformational change initiative(s) in which you played a key role in initiating and/or implementing the change?
  - a. Less than 1 year
  - b. 1 to 2 years
  - c. 3 to 5 years

- d. 5 years or more
  - e. Other (please specify)
  - f. Not applicable
9. Briefly describe the size of the transformational change project(s) in terms of business units involved, scope and revenue impact.

NOTE: If you have not been involved in any transformational organizational change initiatives, please state "N/A" for this question.

(Narrative answer)



## Appendix D: Mindfulness Questionnaire

(To be delivered as part of an online survey)

The rest of this survey examines your general approach to life. Please rate each of the 39 statements below using the scale provided. Select the response for each statement that best describes your own opinion of what is generally true for you. Think about this in terms of your life in general, including your work, your leadership and in your personal life.

Please provide a response for EVERY statement.

1	2	3	4	5
Never or very rarely true	Rarely true	Sometimes true	Often true	Very often or always true

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. When I'm walking, I deliberately notice the sensations of my body moving.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. I'm good at finding words to describe my feelings.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. I criticize myself for having irrational or inappropriate emotions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. I perceive my feelings and emotions without having to react to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. When I do things, my mind wanders off and I'm easily distracted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. When I take a shower or bath, I stay alert to the sensations of water on my body.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. I can easily put my beliefs, opinions, and expectations into words.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. I don't pay attention to what I'm doing because I'm daydreaming, worrying, or otherwise distracted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. I watch my feelings without getting lost in them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. I tell myself I shouldn't be feeling the way I'm feeling.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. I notice how foods and drinks affect my thoughts, bodily sensations, and emotions.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. It's hard for me to find the words to describe what I'm thinking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. I am easily distracted.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. I believe some of my thoughts are abnormal or bad and I shouldn't think that way.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. I pay attention to sensations, such as the wind in my hair or sun on my face.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. I have trouble thinking of the right words to express how I feel about things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. I make judgments about whether my thoughts are good or bad.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. I find it difficult to stay focused on what's happening in the present.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I "step back" and am aware of the thought or image without getting taken over by it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. I pay attention to sounds, such as clocks ticking, birds chirping, or cars passing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. In difficult situations, I can pause without immediately reacting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. When I have a sensation in my body, it's difficult for me to describe it because I can't find the right words.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. It seems I am "running on automatic" without much awareness of what I'm doing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I feel calm soon after.

- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. I tell myself that I shouldn't be thinking the way I'm thinking.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 26. I notice the smells and aromas of things.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 27. Even when I'm feeling terribly upset, I can find a way to put it into words.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 28. I rush through activities without being really attentive to them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 29. When I have distressing thoughts or images I am able just to notice them without reacting.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 30. I think some of my emotions are bad or inappropriate and I shouldn't feel them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 31. I notice visual elements in art or nature, such as colors, shapes, textures, or patterns of light and shadow.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 32. My natural tendency is to put my experiences into words.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 33. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I just notice them and let them go.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 34. I do jobs or tasks automatically without being aware of what I'm doing.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 35. When I have distressing thoughts or images, I judge myself as good or bad, depending on what the thought/image is about.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 36. I pay attention to how my emotions affect my thoughts and behavior.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 37. I can usually describe how I feel at the moment in considerable detail.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 38. I find myself doing things without paying attention.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 39. I disapprove of myself when I have irrational ideas.

## Appendix E: Interview Script

### General Flow:

- Bring to mind their experiences with transformational organizational change
- How did they deal with associated ambiguity?
  - What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others
    - For themselves
    - For others
- Does or could mindfulness help with this?
  - Have they heard of mindfulness? Provide definition.
  - Do they think mindfulness could be helpful in dealing with the ambiguity associated with transformational organizational change?
  - If yes, how could it help?
    - For themselves
    - For others

### Start Interview:

I am looking to discover what strategies, techniques and tactics experienced change leaders use to manage and deal with ambiguity and uncertainty for themselves and others during transformational organizational change.

In the information you have already received about my study there were a number of definitions, including change leadership and transformational organizational change. Do you have any questions about these before we begin?

Research Question	Interview Questions:
What strategies and techniques do experienced change leaders use to manage ambiguity for themselves and others during transformational organizational change?	<p><b>Reflect on the experience(s) you have had with transformational organizational change . . .</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Please bring to mind a transformational organizational change where you played a significant role and where there was a great deal of ambiguity and uncertainty associated with the change effort. Let me know when you have one in mind.           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What made you think of this one?</li> <li>• What were the effects of the ambiguity (on yourself, others, the project, the business)?</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. What strategies and/or tactics did you use to manage ambiguity <b>FOR YOURSELF</b> during this transformational organizational change?           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What was the impact of your actions?</li> <li>b. Is this characteristic of how you handle situations like these? Please explain your response.</li> <li>c. If no, please tell me what was different about this time.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. What strategies and/or tactics did you use <b>TO HELP OTHERS</b> manage ambiguity during this transformational organizational change?           <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. What was the impact of your actions?</li> <li>b. Is this characteristic of how you handle situations like these? Please explain your response.</li> <li>c. If no, please tell me what was different about this time.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

Research Question	Interview Questions:
<p>How and to what degree does mindfulness help experienced change leaders during transformational organizational change?</p>	<p><b>Now I'd like to explore some other possible ways to enhance one's ability to deal with ambiguity during transformational organizational change:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• We've talked about how you manage and deal with the ambiguity and uncertainty associated with Transformational Organizational Change.</li> <li>• Now I'd like to explore alternate methods that might enhance one's abilities in this area.</li> <li>• I'd like to introduce into our conversation the concept of mindfulness. Are you familiar with it?</li> <li>• For this study, mindfulness is considered to be: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Self-regulating one's attention so that it is maintained on one's immediate experience</li> <li>○ In other words, mindfulness is <b>paying attention on purpose in the present moment.</b></li> <li>○ Someone who is mindful is usually characterized by the qualities of <b>curiosity, openness, awareness and acceptance</b></li> <li>○ A mindful change leader can keep the big picture in mind while at the same time being self-aware, focused in the present moment and able to respond to what comes up in that moment without a lot of angst or worry.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• As you think about this now, do you think the qualities of mindfulness that I've just described could be helpful in <b>dealing with ambiguity and uncertainty</b> while leading Transformational Organizational Change? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ If so how or how not?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Have you ever used mindfulness to manage ambiguity, whether or not you call it that? If so how? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ <b>If not</b>, do you think that is something you would try in the future? Why or why not?</li> <li>○ Are there any obstacles / stopping you from doing it?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>What do experienced change leaders believe could be the impact of mindfulness on others' participation and experience of ambiguity during transformational change?</p>	<p><b>Impact of leading transformational change mindfully on others (self-report):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Whether or not you have used mindfulness yourself while leading transformational organizational change, what do you think the impact of incorporating mindfulness could be when leading, managing or playing a significant role in transformational organizational change? (Impact on team members, colleagues, superiors, others, project, overall organization).</li> </ul>
<p>Final Questions</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Do you think that training in mindfulness might be of value in preparing a change leader to lead or manage change? Please explain your response.</li> <li>2. Is there anything else I haven't asked that you think would be useful for the study?</li> </ol>