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Building change agility within teams

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Abstract

Change is necessary for an organization to be successful. However, poorly executed change, with ill-equipped leaders and unprepared teams, often result in failed efforts. Leaders can have a direct impact on their team's change agility and successful change initiatives. This study looked at team leaders and individual contributors across a variety of industries and explored ways that team leaders can build change agility. This study addressed three research questions: how participants defined the role of a leader, what individuals observed about themselves when at their best during a change, and what practices they believed would aid in building change agility and change capacity. Themes were identified and categorized for data analysis. Key themes were summarized and key research findings were discussed. Key recommendations for people leaders highlight the importance of communication, ways to normalize change and discomfort; opportunities for feedback, recognition, and reinforcement; and ways to develop and build capabilities.

Keywords: agility, organizational change, communication, leadership, capacity building

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction

"The only constant is change." This truth extends beyond just personal

implications to organizations. Implementation of a new technology or system, delayering

efforts, new service delivery models, leadership shifts, new functional alignments, and

shifts in culture are all forms of organizational change. Coupled with shifts in

technologies, advancements in communication systems, product lifecycles, and

globalization, the rate of change is exponentially higher than 15 years ago. In fact, the

Human Capital Institute reports that 77% of HR leaders say their organizations are in

consistent change (Harnett, 2018).

Change can be described in two primary dimensions: its pace and associated

disruptiveness (McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009). When the pace of change is accelerated,

organizations are generally equipped to respond to the acceleration and shift processes

accordingly. The organization often has processes in place that can be adjusted in a

methodical and strategic manner. While a shift in the pace of change can be challenging,

the disruptiveness of change is even more so. A disruption is generally unforeseen,

difficult to forecast, and requires immediate focus (McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009).

Change is also paradoxical in nature. It asks leaders to both think proactively towards a

future strategy while continuing to improve an existing strategy. It requires leadership to

do more with less. It tends to demand significant effort and commitment from a range of

stakeholders.

Change management is not a new concept. As a practice, it has been around for

decades. There is Lewin's (1947) 3-stage model, Kotter's (1995) 8-stage model, the

action research model (Cummings & Worley, 2015), the positive model (Cummings &

Worley, 2015), and likely many others that are less widely used. While there are different views on the distinct stages of change management, the overarching opinion is that there are three key stages: recognition and identification of the need for change, the change itself, and adjustment to the new normal (Morgan, 2001).

More often than not, change efforts fail. McKinsey asserts that the failure rate is a little over 60%, while others put the number closer to 70% (Isern, 2009; Kotter, 1995). In the Human Capital Institute's 2016 report, HR leaders disclosed that 85% of the previous two years' change initiatives were unsuccessful (Harnett, 2018).

There is no shortage of possible causes of the breakdown of change initiatives. One assertion is that organizations try to speed through the various stages of the change process by cutting corners, racing through specific stage steps, or skipping steps altogether. Without paying careful attention to each stage and ensuring proper completion, the organization may make mistakes or fail to resolve underlying issues (Kotter, 1995).

A second assertion is that management is poorly equipped to effectively implement the various change management models (Ashkenas, 2013). With a constant barrage of opportunities, approaches, and new directions, leaders can get lost in the various perspectives and strategies to change and lack clarity on execution (Beer & Nohria, 2000). Other potential causes include: 1) lack of clear and purposeful communication (Morgan, 2001), 2) poor transformation effort design that fails to identify the current situation and source issue (Meinert, 2015), 3) ineffective sponsorship, 4) lack of resources, 5) resistance from leaders and/or employees, 6) lack of transparency across stakeholders, and 7) change saturation.

With a consistently high rate of failure, change fatigue has become a prevalent issue. Estimates show that roughly 65% of leaders and employees have experienced change fatigue (Meinart, 2015). Change fatigue can lead to burnout, higher rates of absenteeism, resistance to the change, and, ultimately, increased turnover rates (Meinert, 2015; Wiens & Rowell, 2018). Beaudan (2006) carefully points out that:

> Passive resistance is not lethal in small doses, but over time it leads to a crippling slowdown of the change effort, where the vanguard keeps trudging along while the rest of the troops decide they need a break. In some cases, passive resistance turns into active, vocal resistance – where people openly declare their opposition and do what they can to sabotage change. (p. 3)

Considering the inevitability of change, the increased consistency and pervasiveness of change, the causes of failed change efforts, and the impact of change fatigue, it becomes apparent that leaders need to adjust how they approach change.

If change is associated with a negative connotation, or if employees have participated in several failed change initiatives, there can be an immediate sense of fear associated with change. When a person is confronted with a fear-inducing situation or an unexpected challenge, survival instincts (e.g., fight, flight, or freeze) can kick in and minimize a person's ability to process the situation objectively. In turn, employees may seek out ways to avoid the change, resort to old habits, and maintain a sense of normalcy (Bourton, Lavoie, & Vogel, 2018). The negative consequences of failed or unsuccessful change initiatives have associated costs (Heckleman, 2017). Absenteeism can result in a delay of work completion, increased workloads on others, and decreased engagement. Turnover leads to an increased demand for staffing, training, and time to competency

(McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009). It can also result in an increased workload for team members. As such, it would behoove leaders to consider how they can approach change differently - and how those change efforts could be more successful.

Change agility is "our capacity to be consistently adaptable without having to change. It is the efficiency with which we adapt to nonstop change," (Haneberg, 2011, p. 51). It is the ability to pivot quickly with minimal disruption or added stress to the employee or work cycle. In 2015, McKinsey released research findings on companies with agile practices - specifically measuring speed and stability. Companies that measured high in both speed and stability were defined as agile. 70% of the companies defined as agile also ranked within the top quartile of organizational health. Organizations that rank high from a health performance directly correlate with strong business performance and value creation for stakeholders (Bazigos, De Smet, & Gagnon, 2015). One can infer from this information that a company's capacity to be agile has a direct correlation with business results.

Purpose of this Research

Clearly, change is necessary for an organization to be successful. However, poorly executed change, with ill-equipped leaders and unprepared teams, will result in failed change efforts. Leaders can have a direct impact on their team's change agility and resulting successful change initiatives. The purpose of this thesis was to determine ways for leaders to improve change agility within their team members. To explore this, the research intended to find answers to three primary questions:

1. How do leaders and individual contributors define the role of a leader?

2. What do individuals observe about themselves and their team when they are at their best during a change?

3. What are practical ways a leader can build change agility into a team that better prepares that team to respond to constant change?

Importance of this Research

While there is no shortage on information related to change management, (i.e., change management process steps, the accelerated rate of change, the failure of change, and the impact of unsuccessful or consistent change) there is a lack of research on practical ways to build change agility within teams. The accelerated rate of change and associated turbulence associated with the disruptiveness of change require organizations to think differently and proactively. Leaders are often pulled in a variety of directions: working to improve on daily operations, manage employees effectively, and partnering with others to implement organizational strategy. With so many demands on a leader's time, it is not uncommon for minimal capacity to proactively engage with their teams for the purpose of building agility.

The study aimed to identify common ways to build change agility that can be readily understood, translated, and implemented within teams. The results of this research not only have an impact on individual team members, but their leaders, and the organization as a whole. By taking proactive steps to build agility and adaptability within employees, the organization will position themselves in a way to pivot and shift to the changing environment. From an employee perspective, the ability to adapt and anticipate organizational changes and shifts will reduce stress, fatigue, and turn-over, while also increasing engagement.

Organization of this Research Report

Chapter 1 explored the accelerated rate of change, the success and failure rates of change initiatives, the impact of unsuccessful change initiatives, why this study is important, and the implications of the study. Chapter 2 will discuss existing literature and theories surrounding change agility from an individual and team-based perspective. Specifically, it will explore relevant literature, the paradoxical nature of change agility, neurological aspects to agility, factors that contribute to agility, ways to condition the brain and build agility, and the role of the leader. Chapter 3 focuses on the research design and methodology, particularly narrowing in on the audience, research setting, data collection, and analysis. Chapter 4 examines the results of the research and data analysis. Chapter 5 provides a summary of findings and draws conclusions. Recommendations to managers are made, as well as separately to OD Practitioners. Limitations are cited and suggestions for further research are presented.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Change agility in organizations, teams, and individuals should not be considered a temporary advantage. The power in building change agility lies in its repeatability. To enable agility and sustained adaptability over time, organizations and their leaders must focus on building processes that support sustained adaptability (Worley, Williams, & Lawler III, 2016). This chapter summarizes the existing literature on change agility to support the research purpose: to determine ways for leaders to improve change agility within their teams. The information covered in this chapter has been arranged into six key subtopic areas. The chapter starts with defining change agility. Second, it will explore the neurological aspects to agility and agile thinking benefits. Third, it will look at factors of an agile team. Fourth, it will highlight several ways to develop change agility within teams. Fifth, it will examine the role of a leader in building change agility in a team. Finally, it will provide a summary of the literature covered.

Defining Change Agility

In order to maintain success and win in a competitive market, it is vital for companies to excel at maintaining a sense of stability while also looking for ways to evolve and anticipate what the future market will demand (Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017; O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2004). Organizations must look for ways to refine current processes and offerings, as well as innovate (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2004; Sparr, 2018). To that end, at a more individual level, leaders and employees also experience this paradox. Leaders and individual employees are consistently expected to maintain the status quo of existing daily operations, while also leaning forward into changing roles, work statements, and modes of operation (Smith & Lewis, 2011; Sparr, 2018).

Haneberg (2011) asserts that there are three key types of agility: resources, performance, and focus. Performance agility is how organizations, teams, and individuals effectively engage in both continual process improvement and the utilization of its people. For example, performance agility can involve candid, honest, and/or difficult conversations; providing instrumental assistance; performance management and/or improvement plans; and coaching (Haneberg, 2011). Resource agility refers to how effectively human, environmental, financial, and material capital within and around an organization is used. It can involve organizational optimization efforts, risk assessment and mitigation, teambuilding, and an intentional orientation toward the customer (Haneberg, 2011). Focus agility refers to how individuals, teams, and organizations delineate the direction and orientation of their attention. Focus agility can include analysis; organizational alignment; setting of individual, team, and organizational priorities; shifting statements of work to better support the organization's vision and strategy; retrospective reviews; and debriefing (Haneberg, 2011).

An additional aspect to focus agility is cognitive agility. Within today's society, individuals are consistently bombarded with divergent opinions and demands on time and focus. This requires the individual to determine which conflicting demand on their focus to pivot towards. Cognitive agility is the ability to quickly and intentionally adapt focus and attention in order to meet the claims and requests that inundate daily life- to remain focused, as well as open (Good & Yeganeh, 2012).

Neurological Aspects to Agility

Until recently, there has been minimal knowledge and research into the specific interplay of neuroscience and agility. However, significant strides were made in the past

few decades to understand how the brain functions in the face of change and how to better utilize our brain's capacity for change and change agility.

Conservation of energy. The brain is primed for efficiency. From an evolutionary perspective, it operationalizes itself to reduce the amount of energy consumed in consistent functioning (Gotts, Chow, & Martin, 2012; Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017). New behaviors and activities require the creation of new neural connections, which, in turn, requires more chemical energy to be expelled (Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017). However, once a behavior has already occurred and been repeated, the brain expels significantly less energy in subsequent recurrence. As a result, the brain is predisposed to habitual and patterned behaviors (Bourton, Lavoie, & Vogel, 2018; Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017). The more consistent the patterned behavior, the more embedded the neural pathway becomes. Eventually, the behavior in question becomes an unconscious reflex and barely registers (if at all) in awareness (Hill, 2013; Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017). Consequently, humans are inclined to repeat behaviors and likely do not even realize that this is happening.

When a person is faced with consistent and unanticipated change, particularly when that person feels overwhelmed, inadequately prepared, and believes that they lack the skills and resources to be successful in the midst of that change, it triggers a neurological response characterized by a dramatic increase in cortisol levels of the brain's limbic system. Over time, continuous and chronological stressful situations that result in these influxes of cortisol can damage the brain's functioning and growth (Siegel, 2010). In scenarios such as this, the brain resorts to survival mode, commonly referred to as

"fight, flight, or freeze" and acts upon those previously ingrained patterns to return to a level of stasis (Bourton, Lavoie, & Vogel, 2018).

Neuroplasticity. Organizations, teams, and employees do not need to resign themselves to the status quo due to the brain's energy conservation orientation (Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017). While repetition and the reliance upon old behaviors enable the brain to conserve energy by using existing neural connections, new activities and behaviors are possible through the creation of new neural pathways (also known as neuroplasticity). It does require intentional practice and focus to enable the building of new pathways, in turn enabling new patterns and behaviors (Siegel, 2010).

Siegel (2010) asserts that to effectively engage in a shift away from the reliance upon existing behaviors does require a paradoxical relationship with the brain's neural pathways- utilizing both existing connections, while actively creating new ones. The brain must be conditioned to discourage predisposition to homeostasis and reorient towards a mindset of openness and flexibility. To engage in exercising variability does require a higher expenditure of energy and will likely feel uncomfortable at first. To reduce the instinctual reversion back to the old patterns, due to the discomfort, Pascale et al. (1997) recommend normalizing this discomfort as a natural part of the growth process. By normalizing the discomfort and labeling the emotions and feelings incurred, an individual can recognize the value of the activity and lessen the burden of the discomfort. As the orientation shifts from passive engagement to intentional variability, the reliance upon the old behaviors becomes less instinctual and provides the individual with choice (Haneberg, 2011). The previous neural pathways become less ingrained and the new connections become more pronounced (Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017).

Benefits to agile thinking. Instead of continuing to rely on old habits, which may or may not be beneficial in the current market and environment, Haneberg (2011) asserts that agile thinking enables employees, teams, and organizations to reorient towards more efficient behaviors and patterns of work. This often leads to increased productivity and optimism as employees become less stunted and discouraged by overwhelming change.

Agile thinking enables employees to view situations from varying perspectives, without providing unwarranted value to the familiar. It allows individuals to uncover alternate methods that can provide the most desirable result for each unique situation. Agile thinking also supports the ability to recognize each situation as unique and may not demand the standardized solution or process. It provides the individual with an openness to assess each unique scenario and the variables that are involved. Instead of thinking in concrete terms, individuals can think in abstract and theoretical terms (Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017).

Finally, agile thinking places far less strain on employees. When agility is the norm, individuals are not consistently placed in a "threat" status, where their brain is consistently reacting to the influx of cortisol on the system. Employees exhibit less stress and defensiveness as a result of the normalized agility (Haneberg, 2011; Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017).

Factors that Contribute to Agility

Research pertaining to change agility shows several key factors are consistently expressed as contributing to or correlated with agility within an organizational environment. The factors that will be explored within this section are a clear and

compelling vision and direction, clear communication, mindset, and psychological safety and trust.

A clear and compelling vision enables employees to grasp the overarching direction that the company is heading (O'Reilly III & Tushman, 2004). The vision is an inspirational, goal-driven purpose that ideally links to the individual's values. When employees share a sense of value and a common identity that links to the organization's overarching vision and understand the intention and purpose of that vision, they are better positioned to align their daily tasks and projects to contribute to that vision (Bahrami & Evans, 2011; McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009).

Clear communication aids in agility through a few contributing factors. First, clear communication from leaders that explains the current environment and future strategy enables employees to understand where the organization is heading. That communication then needs to trickle down to the various organization sub-groups to contextualize it within an individual team. Intentionally injecting purposeful questions to enable variability and alternative viewpoints further enables agility (Bahrami & Evans, 2011; Onderick-Harvey, 2018; Wanberg & Banas, 2000).

Tangential to clear communication is access to customer information. When a team or individual is closely connected to the customer they serve and can understand their customer's key drivers, the environment they exist within, and their markers of success, then the team and/or individual is better able to position themselves. Close alignment to customers allows organizations, teams, and individuals to orient themselves in an anticipatory way. Breu et al. (2012) go so far as to assert that close alignment and customer tie-in may be the strongest predictor of change agility.

An individual's mindset is directly related to agility. When a person has a fixed mindset, they tend to believe that the situation they are in and the skills they bring to a given situation are fixed (Dweck, 2019). Therefore, from this perspective, they believe that there is minimal reason to work towards development and changing. Alternatively, when a person has a growth mindset, they believe that there are plenty of opportunities for them and they can work towards those goals through developing themselves and putting in work to hone necessary skills (Dweck, 2019). Those with a fixed mindset tend to be overwhelmed by change and defensive. However, those with a growth mindset tend to look at change as an opportunity to shift perspectives, grow, and evolve. While mindset is relatively stable, it is a state of being, as opposed to a trait (Dweck, 2019). Therefore, it can change over time (Bligh, Kohles, & Yan, 2018; Heslin, 2010).

Psychological safety and trust also correlate to change agility. Trust is critical to build a climate of psychological safety (Edmondson, 1999). Psychological safety and trust enable employees to be candid and honest with one another and enables them to engage in calculated risk without unreasonable fear of failure. Psychological safety allows individuals to acknowledge failed efforts and mistakes in an objective manner and identify opportunities to learn and grow from that experience (Bahrami & Evans, 2011). It allows individuals and teams to engage in productive conflict, by allowing diverse thought and trusting that each person is looking to find the best possible solution (Onderick-Harvey, 2018).

Ways to Develop Change Agility

The following section will build upon the contributing factors research discussed in the previous section. It will highlight existing research regarding ways to build change

agility within teams and individuals, as well as condition the brain to become more agile. The section will discuss the following: normalizing discomfort and tension, willingness to do things differently, injecting variability, empowering teams, focusing on the purpose and direction, shifts in feedback and recognition, and retrospective reviews or lessons learned conversations.

Normalizing discomfort and tension. When individuals are faced with an incredibly ambiguous situation, mountainous challenges, and constantly confronted with change initiative after change initiative, they feel a heightened level of stress, tension, discomfort, anxiety, or defensiveness. It is important for organizations, leaders, and teams to recognize this aspect of change and acknowledge the human factors and associated emotions (Ates & Bititci, 2011). Individuals have different tolerance levels for change and the threat state that results from change can be lessened when normalizing that reaction and labeling it (Smollan, 2017; Wanberg & Banas, 2000). Discomfort does not need to always be labeled as a 'bad' reaction. Sparr (2018) suggests that discomfort can lead to growth, healthy competition, and challenge. It often encourages individuals and teams to seek out ways to make sense of the ambiguity and ease the uneasiness and tension. Through this exploration, alternative, more efficient, and more profitable solutions may be identified (Hill et al., 2017). As organizations acknowledge the tension, discomfort, and ambiguity, the individual's capacity for toleration becomes greater (Bourton et al., 2018; Pascale et al., 1997).

Willingness to do things differently. Organizations can aid in building agility by modeling a willingness to do things differently (Hill et al., 2017). For example, Ates and Bitici (2011) recommend that agile frameworks, discussions, and practices should be

built into everyday processes, meetings, and routines. Organizations and leaders should proactively engage change agents and/or early adopters to exemplify agile behaviors and showcase the opportunities (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018). By highlighting the positive aspects of change through organizational communications, specifically leadership conversations and team dialogue, the organization can instill a more positive view of change in general (Smollan, 2017).

Additionally, agile capacity can be built through reframing the situation itself to look at things from alternative angles or looking at the change as an opportunity instead of a threat (Bourton et al., 2018; Sparr, 2018). Taking it a step further, reevaluating the goals and direction can ensure alignment with organizational strategy and priorities. If the goal does not align, it highlights the need to pivot (Bourton et al., 2018).

Good and Yageneh (2012) emphasize that mindfulness can aid in building agility and a willingness to engage in agile practices. By taking a moment to calm oneself and focus on the present, recognize what triggers are at play, and acknowledge what is in one's awareness, they will provide space to be more flexible (David & Congleton, 2013). The flexibility that is rooted in grounded mindfulness enables an individual to pivot between focus and the openness to observe new information or try something new (Good & Yeganeh, 2012).

Moving beyond a willingness to do things differently is looking at homeostasis as a less than satisfactory state. Pascale et al. (2018) even go so far as to recommend instilling a "relentless dissatisfaction with the status quo" (p. 139). Essentially, Pascale et al. (2018) asserts the importance of a desire for change and a belief that to continue in the same process or pattern can result in complacency.

Introducing variability. Hill et al. (2017) share that variability is a great way to build change agility. Variability, also called practiced varying, can be introduced into daily operations and processes through several avenues. This section will explore a few of those avenues, specifically diversity of people and teams, diversity in initiatives and projects, and through practice scenarios. According to Hill et al. (2017), variability can lead to less reliance on formal methods and reinforce changes in behavior. Variability can aid in the transition from current state to future state.

The diversity of people and teams can take on a few different forms. For example, diversity of people (e.g., experience level, expertise, age, ethnicity, worldview) enables different perspectives and levels of experience on a project. Enabling teams to have a diverse group of people creates additional opportunities for healthy debate and differing views. Injecting new people into a stable team can also introduce the amount of variance the team needs to jolt it out of complacency. Taking one or two people out of one team and placing them into a new team can also provide those individuals with additional challenges and opportunities to develop (Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017). Allowing employees and teams to experience new groups and functions, as well as build their skills in alternative ways, enables them to build a more diverse portfolio of roles that they could move into as change demands (Bahrami & Evans, 2011).

According to Wright (2000), building the capacity for agility can also involve variable scenario planning, systems thinking, and creative problem-solving. Scenario planning enables teams and individuals to identify possible different scenarios of what could happen and work through ways to approach each of those scenarios. Key considerations for scenario planning include an environmental scan to understand the key

drivers that could impact the future and organization, identifying the end state of a specific time-scale, and the different steps that are necessary to get to that state, with consideration given to the areas where things can impact that plan (Wright, 2000). Scenario planning enables teams to be future-focused, less stressed by uncertain futures, feel more prepared for various future scenarios, and enables creativity for unpredictable outcomes (McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009; Wright, 2000).

Empower teams and individuals. Existing research shows that in larger organizations, structure, processes, and systems of checks and balances have worked well for the company in the past, in actuality, may inhibit the organization's ability to build agility.

Empowering teams and individuals may help to increase the organization's agility. First, do not rely solely upon individualistic or siloed statements of work. Instead, provide opportunities and encourage teams to work closely together and engage with one another. This is particularly poignant for functionally oriented groups (Warner, 2017). Bahrami and Evans (2011) recommend for leaders to provide opportunities for those functional units to partner with others outside their function on special projects or initiatives. If special projects or initiatives are not readily available, provide opportunities for cross-functional engagement (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018).

Horne et al. (2014) recommend showing confidence in the organization's teams and individual employees. Provide teams and individuals with a stretch project, a task with unusual complexity, or an initiative that has not been done before and requires a great deal of creativity and complex analysis (Hill et al., 2017). Instill a sense of trust that they will be able to rise to task and deliver a successful outcome. Allow the team

and/or individual to completely own the process and drive the outcome. Allow them to make necessary decisions as required without consistently needing to loop in leadership (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018).

Not only is it helpful to enable employees to make relevant decisions, but it is also impactful to decentralize decision-making. Cappelli and Tavis (2018) share that hierarchical decision-making and chains of command minimize agility. It slows down the process, increases the risk of critical information getting lost in the communication process, decreases transparency, and puts decision-making further away from the people embedded in the situation itself. While some decisions involve high organizational risk and should involve leadership, empower the front-line to make business-relevant decisions when possible (Ates & Bititci, 2011; Breu et al., 2002).

Focus on the purpose and direction. Onderick-Harvey (2018) shares that in an uncertain, volatile, and tumultuous environments, it is natural to transition focus to the here and now. When the future is intangible, when roles are unclear, when the decision-making authority is not transparent, it is not uncommon to want to focus on the direct task at hand and not consider what is coming next week or the coming month. This short-term and nearsighted view contributes to isolationism and builds barriers and siloes. However, by taking the time to reinforce the shared purpose and future-state direction, the organization can build a common value that binds people together and instills a sense of pride in the work they do. By providing value, people feel more engaged, more confident, and more willing to take risks for that common purpose. Bourton et al. (2018) provides a great image for looking towards the future:

Draw a bigger weather map. Expand the boundaries of your mental weather map
to see the weather patterns (business trends) that created the thunderstorm (your
current business dilemma). Taking the long view can diminish the anxiety caused
by near-term worries. (p. 8)

Retrospective and error learning. Horney et al. (2014), Pascale et al. (1997),
and Putz et al. (2013) share that the concept of a retrospective and error-learning
conversation is a great way to build agility within individuals, teams, and organizations.
The retrospective can be conducted at the tail-end of a project or deliverable, as well as
during. The retrospective is designed to discuss what the overall outcome of the project
was intended to be, what the actual outcome was, what worked well, what did not work
well, what could be done in the future to yield a more successful outcome, and what
should be repeated. Putz et al. (2013) assert that error-learning can be a discussion with a
large group, a couple of people, or even individually. Like the retrospective, it is geared
towards reflecting on the situation, detecting and identifying errors, determining how to
mitigate or correct those errors moving forward, and then applying that learning to future
situations.

Retrospectives and error-learning conversations are predicated on the ability to
have open, candid, and objective conversations (Warner, 2017). It requires a willingness
to openly discuss failures, mistakes, and performance gaps. When those areas are
discussed, it is necessary not to point fingers or place blame on a specific person, team, or
area. Instead, the conversation must remain objectively focused and focus on observable
facts - not inferences or subjective assumptions (Pascale et al., 1997).

Bligh et al. (2018) highlight that "although mistakes often result in negative outcomes, they can also provide the impetus to create significant change and to foster individual and system-level learning" (p. 118). Even the terms such as failure, mistake, and error tend to elicit a negative reaction due to the meaning individuals give them. Therefore, part of the process of building agility in the retrospective and error-learning process is to give those terms new meaning. Honest mistakes and errors should be looked at as growth, development, and change opportunities. Punishment and shame should not be the reflexive reaction to admitted failure.

According to Sparr (2018), these conversations must come from a place of honest inquiry and curiosity - with a genuine desire to learn from the present situation and further enable growth and process improvement. People generally like to feel as though there is a purpose for things, including mistakes and errors. When they feel as though there is a purpose to that failure, they can pinpoint the source of their error, and then identify a potential solution. It cements the error-learning further and provides even greater incentive to apply the learning.

Feedback, recognition, and reinforcement. Often, large organizations and leaders utilize standardized processes for providing feedback and recognition. Feedback and recognition are often directed by the processes built into performance management (which at some companies is only done annually or bi-annually). Employees are then recognized for the deliverables they provide or other priorities they implement or complete. While it is understandable to recognize and acknowledge people based upon their accomplishments and in a consistent cadence, this section will share research for additional considerations when attempting to build agility within a team.

When looking to build an appetite for error learning and a culture where learning from mistakes is celebrated and safe, Hill et al. (2017) recommend reinforcing that behavior through recognition and positive feedback. Practice variability in the timing, consistency, method, and venue. By incorporating variability in feedback, employers can "increase neurological energy reserves and improve the sort of brain performance favoring sustained levels of agile thinking" (Hill et al., 2017, p. 228).

Cappelli and Tavis (2018) recommend building in opportunities for peer to peer feedback. Peers typically work closer together than an employee would with his or her supervisor. Due to the closeness, peers can generally recognize when something went well, or if there is a need for another employee to pivot in order to be successful. Also, there seems to be less stress involved in peer to peer feedback than feedback from superiors (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018).

The Role of the Leader

Heckelman (2017) asserts that the direct manager or first-level leader plays a significant role in building change agility within his or her team. That leader directly impacts the employee's understanding of the organization's direction, the future vision, and how their role fits into that larger picture (McCann et al., 2009). This section will explore a few ways that existing leaders can build change agility within their teams. The topics covered include coaching; sensemaking and sensegiving; instrumental support; and preparation.

Coaching. A leader can play a significant role in building change agility by assuming a coaching role for employees, particularly when they seem to be struggling to cope with change or pivot to an agile approach (Haneberg, 2011). As leaders are closely

tied in with their employees, they should be able to recognize symptoms of struggle and be able to provide one-on-one coaching to that employee to identify specific pain points or barriers and enable the employee to identify ways to work through or overcome those barriers (Heckelman, 2017).

Warner (2017) recommends that to be most impactful as a coach, the leader should not step in and fix the issue at hand, or explicitly spell out the actions that the employee should take to overcome the specific pain point they are having with the change or issue. Instead, if the manager can join the conversation from a place of honest curiosity and inquisitiveness, they will be more impactful in guiding the employee to identify their own path forward. They can also reframe situations to help remove some of the emotional reaction and aid in making some solutions become more apparent (McCann et al., 2009). By enabling the employee to build tools to change and overcome hurdles, they build the agility and resilience necessary to apply the same knowledge to future situations (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Pascale et al., 1997).

Not all managers are trained coaches or apt at identifying when an employee may be struggling. Organizations can, at times, underestimate just how much impact that a leader can have on their team and the organization achieving their vision. It is important for managers and organizations alike to ensure that managers get the appropriate training and knowledge necessary to be effective coaches (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018).

Sensemaking and sensegiving. The employee's direct manager is in a unique position to have visibility to the organizational strategy and direction, as well as be the direct translator of that information to their employees. Sparr (2018) suggests that the leader's role is to take the organizational strategy, internalize it, make sense of it for

themselves (also known as sensemaking), and then provide that understood version in ways that are meaningful for their team (also known as sensegiving).

Tangentially, the manager can provide clarity on how their team's goals and priorities fit within the broader organizational direction. The leader has the distinct ability to impact the team's sense of purpose and impact on the bigger picture strategy (Bourton et al., 2018; Heckelman, 2017). People like to understand the purpose behind the change and the impact that it will have on their role, their statement of work, and their daily operating rhythm. If the leader can make sense of the paradoxical need for change and the purpose for continuing to build on the current operating rhythm, the team's capacity for change and agile ability (Sparr, 2018). However, if the leader does a poor job translating that vision and making sense of the paradox, he or she could further exacerbate the problem (Ates & Bititci, 2011; Sparr, 2018).

Instrumental support. The leader can make a direct impact on the team's ability to drive innovation and aid in agile practices by providing instrumental support (Heckelman, 2017). Many times, the instrumental support that can be most impactful is the empowerment of the team and the removal of barriers. By removing barriers and complexity, the leader alleviates stress, removes unnecessary hurdles to getting the job done (Smollan, 2017), and provides additional space for innovation and creativity (Bahrami & Evans, 2011; Heckelman, 2017).

Additionally, the leader has the capacity to provide their team with relevant resources, tools, information, and capacity to do their job in a meaningful, efficient, and agile way (Heckelman, 2017). By providing resources not readily at their disposal, the

leader frees up capacity for the team to focus on priority topics and not on time-consuming or low-value-add activities.

Preparation. In order to do any of the above, the leader needs to be adequately prepared and clear on their own role within the company, their capacity to build change agility, and the steps they can take to better equip their team. Leaders do need to seek out relevant training opportunities, take necessary steps to make sense of a given change initiative and translate it to their team, and anticipate the support his or her team will need during change (Heckelman, 2017).

Summary

The literature provides a wealth of information related to the factors involved in change agility and its impact. The content highlighted within this chapter included the paradoxical nature of change agility, three key types of agility, neurological aspects to agility, key factors of an agile team, ways to build change agility, and the role of a leader in building change agility within his or her team.

It is apparent that building change agility within teams is possible, but it does require intentionality, repetition, and reinforcement. There are several key factors that contribute to change agility within teams and some recommendations for how to build in change agility. However, the literature seems to lack in explicit examples and steps that a leader can use to implement agile processes in the team and build agility within his or her team. There also seemed to be gaps in how team members perceive the transition from a less agile team to one that engages in agile practices.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter describes the methodology used for this study. It begins by highlighting the research questions, followed by an outline of its design, sampling methodology, interview design and structure, protection of human subjects, and data analysis procedures.

Research Purpose

While extensive research exists on change management, the impact of change, the benefits of agility, and what conditions enable change agility, there is limited research on practical ways for leaders to develop change agility into their team members. To explore this, the research intends to find answers to three primary questions:

1. How do leaders and individual contributors define the role of a leader?
2. What do individuals observe about themselves and their team when they are at their best during a change?
3. What are practical ways a leader can build change agility into a team that better prepares that team to respond to constant change?

Research Design

A qualitative research design was chosen for this study for a few primary reasons. First, a qualitative study can aid in understanding not only the actual activities happening, but also in how individuals attribute meaning to these actions (Maxwell, 2013). Change agility can attribute different meanings for individuals. Aspects of change agility may hold different values for different teams. An individual's belief of the role of a leader may be very different than another's belief of that role. By using qualitative methods, the

research enabled a more thorough exploration of these different values. Additionally, a qualitative study allowed the researcher to better understand the environmental context of the individuals and the processes involved in any events referenced or that may have impacted on the individual responses (Maxwell, 2013).

Sampling Methodology

The sampling methodologies used for this study involved both a purposeful approach and a snowball sampling technique. Both team leaders and individual contributors were intentionally included in the research to better understand the context under which both leaders and individual contributors operate. This enabled exploration of how leaders and individual contributors define a leader, identify differences between leadership behavior and individual contributor perceptions (and if there were differences, how anticipated results may or may not yield actual results), contributing variables and barriers to change agility, attribute causal relationships, and understand outcomes from both perspectives. The study included 12 total participants, six individual contributors and six leaders. The participants were chosen from a variety of industries and functions, as change agility may carry different meaning within each environmental context. To ensure the topic was relevant for each participant, each participant confirmed that they had been through at least one major change initiative within the past one to two years.

A snowball sampling technique was used to further identify additional participants on recommendation from existing interviewees. This enabled the inclusion of others that have a knowledge of or passion for change agility and that existing participants believe should be included.

Demographics.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

	Gender	Status	Participant Location	Role in Company	Time at Company	Time in Role	Professional Experience
1	Male	Individual Contributor	Plano, TX	Senior Client Services Partner	0.5 years	6 months	29 years
2	Female	People Leader	Milwaukee, WI	Director of E-Commerce	2 years	2 years	15 years
3	Female	Individual Contributor	Chicago, IL	Compensation and Talent Consultant	2.5 years	6 years	12 years
4	Male	Individual Contributor	Seattle, WA	Partner Resources Manager	2.5 years	2.5 years	15 years
5	Male	People Leader	Chicago, IL	Lead Pastor	3 years	3 years	45 years
6	Female	Individual Contributor	Seattle, WA	Marketing Manager	3.5 years	1.5 years	8 years
7	Female	Individual Contributor	Tacoma, WA	Director of Development- West Coast Fundraising	5 years	1.5 years	15 years
8	Female	Individual Contributor	Seattle, WA	Senior Vendor Manager	7 years	5 months	12 years
9	Male	People Leader	Dearborn, MI	Design Manager	8.5 years	6 months	19 years
10	Male	People Leader	Everett, WA	Manufacturing Supervisor	9 years	4 months	9 years
11	Male	People Leader	Chicago, IL	Manager in Client Services	11 years	2 years	23 years
12	Female	People Leader	Phoenix, AZ	HR Director	22 years	4 years	26 years

Table 2

Company Demographics

Gender	Company Industry	Company Size	Company Sector	Headquarter Location
Female	Manufacturing of durable consumer goods	2900	Public	Milwaukee, WI
Female	HR Consulting	25000	Public	New York, New York
Male	Aerospace & Defense	155000	Public	Chicago, IL
Female	Retail	7000	Public	Seattle, WA
Male	Religious Organization	40	Non-Profit	Chicago, IL
Female	Water, Sanitation, & Hygiene Programming	400	Non-Profit	Stafford, TX
Male	Aerospace Manufacturing	155000	Public	Chicago, IL
Male	Retail	400000	Public	Seattle, WA
Male	Manufacturing	180000	Public	Detroit, MI
Female	Travel & Technology	24,500	Public	Seattle, WA
Male	Aerospace Manufacturing	155000	Public	Chicago, IL
Female	Retail/ Restaurant	100000	Public	Seattle, WA

Interview design and structure. A qualitative, semi-structured interview approach was chosen. Interview questions were developed for two distinct populations, individual contributors in a team and team leaders (see Appendix A). The same interview protocol was used for each subgroup to allow for appropriate comparisons. The semi-structured aspect allowed for possible probes to go deeper to further understand the meaning and context behind an interviewee's answers and intentions (Maxwell, 2013).

The design of each interview question for both populations were similar. However, the key differences appear in questions where the leader is the one doing the action versus the individual contributor. For example, one question for the team leaders asks, "Are there any consistent practices or activities that you have done to provide your team with a greater capacity for change?" Tangentially, the related question for individual contributors asked, "Are there any consistent practices or activities that you have observed your leader doing that have provided you with a greater capacity for change?" The similarity, as touched on above, will allow for more complete comparisons and relationships across interviews. Each interview question was designed to elicit understanding of the interviewee's environmental context, understanding of change agility, the role of a leader, existing and desired practices for building change agility, and support the research study's objectives.

Two pilot interviews were conducted on both a leader and individual contributor to test the strength of the questions, relatability to the research objective, and highlight any areas that needed further clarification or modification.

Interviews of about 60 minutes were conducted in-person at the interviewee's place of employment when possible. When the place of employment was not an option, interviews were conducted in a quiet, neutral setting or conducted virtually.

Notes and audio recordings were used to capture the interviews. This allowed for full engagement and active listening. It also provided an opportunity to gather direct quotes where necessary and helpful. Participants were advised that the session would be recorded and that their responses would remain completely confidential.

Protection of human subjects. All safeguards for the protection of human subjects were followed. Participant responses were kept confidential. No names or attributable details were documented or captured in any reporting of this research. Fictional names were used to highlight relevant quotes or examples within the summary. Any recordings of interviews used for the data analysis were kept in a secure file and will be deleted two years upon completion of approval and publication.

Data Analysis

Using Creswell and Creswell's (2018) process for data analysis in a qualitative research design, themes were first identified based on interviews. Themes and topics were coded throughout the interview transcripts. These coded topics were then assessed against the initial transcripts to ensure alignment with the original context of the discussed. Each of the coded topics were then placed into categories. Similar categories were then grouped together and interrelationships among them were identified and highlighted.

Summary

This chapter described the methodology used for this research study. It began by highlighting the research questions, followed by an outline of the research design, the sampling methodology, interview design and structure, protection of human subjects, data analysis procedures, and the limitations of this research approach. Chapter 4 will present and explore the results of this research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this research was to understand if there are practical ways for leaders to build change agility into their team members. Interviews attempted to answer the following questions:

1. How do leaders and individual contributors define the role of a leader?

2. What do individuals observe about themselves and their team when they are at their best during a change?

3. What are practical ways a leader can build change agility into a team that better prepares that team to respond to constant change?

This chapter presents the results of 12 interviews with six leaders and six individual contributors and outlines key themes that emerged from the interviews.

Key Themes

Throughout the interviews, multiple themes emerged as notable. The following section highlights those key themes, discusses relevant similarities and differences between leader and individual contributor responses, and provides direct quotes from interviewees as appropriate for context. Table 3 shows a high-level overview of the themes covered and the frequency of mention.

Table 3

Key Themes

	Leader Responses (f/6)	N	%	Individual Contributor Responses (f/6)	N	%
1.What does the role of a leader look like for you?	Challenge & Empower	5	83%	Challenge & Empower	4	67%
	Communications & Translation	4	67%	Communications & Translation	4	67%
	Change Advocate	3	50%	Change Advocate	4	67%
	Team Advocate	2	33%	Team advocate	4	67%
	Example & Model	3	50%	Collaboration, coaching, and listening	4	67%
				Miscellaneous	2	33%
2.What does change agility mean to you?	Attitude towards change	4	67%	Attitudes toward change –	6	100%
	Responsiveness to change	4	67%	Responsiveness to change	5	83%
3.When your team is at its best during a change, what do you observe about your team?	Collaboration and teaming	3	50%	Collaboration and teaming –	5	83%
	Willingness to do things differently	5	83%	Willingness to do things differently	3	50%
	Energy and excitement	4	67%	Energy and excitement	2	33%
	Miscellaneous	3	50%	Communication –	4	67%
				Miscellaneous	2	33%
4.When you are at your best during a change, what do you observe about yourself?	Clarity	4	67%	Clarity	6	100%
	Energy and Engagement	4	67%	Energy and Engagement	3	50%
	Intentionality	6	100%	Miscellaneous	2	33%
	Miscellaneous	1	17%			
5. Are there any consistent practices or activities that you have (observed your leader doing that have provided you/ done to provide your team) with a greater capacity for change?	Comms & Translation	5	83%	Comms & Translation	4	67%
	Normalize change & discomfort	3	50%	Normalize change & discomfort	2	33%
	Empower and Involve Team	4	67%	Team care & Authenticity	4	67%
6.What practices or activities (do you wish your leader would do with you and your team /would you like to do with your team) to build capacity for change?	Communication	4	67%	Communication	5	83%
	Feedback, reinforcement & recognition	3	50%	Feedback, reinforcement & recognition	4	67%
	Normalization of change & discomfort	5	83%	Development & Teambuilding –	4	67%
	Empowerment and Capability Building	3	50%			

There were six questions upon which analysis discovered approximately 22 themes. Of these 22 themes, communication showed the greatest importance as determined by number of mentions. Following communication, the interviewees indicated that attitudes toward change, clarity, and normalization of change and discomfort are significantly important. Responsiveness to change, willingness to do things differently, advocating change are also worth noting due to their relatedness and number of mentions.

Q1. The role of a leader. Interviewees were asked to define how they view the role of a leader. Both leaders and individual contributors believed that the role of a leader is to 1) challenge and empower their employees, 2) communicate effectively and translate organizational level strategy, 3) act as an advocate for the team, and 4) advocate for change. Existing leaders believed that a leader should act as an example for their team by modelling authenticity and acting as a servant leader. Individual contributors asserted that leaders should also be collaborators, coaches, and actively listen to the members of their team.

Challenge and empower. Nine of the 12 interviewees believed that part of the role of a leader included challenging and empowering their employees. According to those interviewees, a leader should challenge employees to continue to grow and think outside of the box. The leader should enable their team to take on new tasks, experiment with new initiatives, and grow their roles. A leader should decentralize decision-making power and empower the individuals on their teams to make decisions, particularly decisions around day-to-day items and things that impact them. Tangentially, leaders ought to hold employees accountable for following through on those decisions. The team

leader based at the manufacturing company in Milwaukee shared how they approached empowering their new team (which had been micromanaged previously:

> So, one of the one of the big things I was actually changing is my team could not make a decision no matter how small without coming to me. So, everything was like, "Well, here, here's what it is. What do you want to do?" And [that] was one of the first things I had to change -enabling them to own their work and make decisions. And one of the pieces I had to do there was basically say, "OK, like here's the thing that you want to bring me in for. Otherwise, what is the objective of your role? And if this decision ladders up to that objective, then I expect you to make that decision on your own. I'm always here. The door is always open for you to discuss. But, you know, I expect you to make those decisions from now on."

Communication and translation. Both team leaders and individual contributors alike (eight of those interviewed) viewed leaders as a key conduit to what is happening in the broader organization. They expected a leader to communicate what they are hearing from the broader organization, particularly as it related to the vision, priorities, and team direction. Beyond strictly flowing information down, the interviewees asserted that leaders had the distinct role of translating the broader organizational strategy as it relates to the team (in other words, sensemaking and sensegiving). When it came to a particular change event, leaders were expected to go beyond communicating the 'what' of the change and also communicate the 'why' behind the decision. According to a leader based at a large retail company in Seattle, "It is creating the vision around the why, like why are we making this decision and here is the vision."

Team advocate. Six interviewees believed that a leader must take time to know and understand their team. A leader should understand where their team members' passions lie, what their strengths are, and discover opportunities for further development. Beyond this knowledge, a leader should enable their team to take on projects that align with those passions. A leader should champion employee ideas and remove obstacles where necessary. Additionally, the leader has responsibility of assisting the employee in their own personal development.

Change advocate. Ehen asked about the role of a leader in general, eight participants explicitly asserted that a leader should normalize change and encourage risk-taking and experimentation. A leader should express that change is normal, will happen consistently, and is an important part of the evolution of a company. The leader should embody comfort with change and a desire to continuously grow and shift. They should hold conversations with employees on what they see in the environment.

Leaders should also provide the team with space for creativity and innovation. Beyond providing the space, the leader should encourage risk-taking and experimentation When experiments do not yield positive results, employees should not be punished for failure, but recognized for the fact that they were experimenting and innovating. Providing an environment where employees feel safe to take calculated risks is essential to their role.

Example and model. Three of six existing team leaders highlighted that their role required them to serve as examples to their teams. They should show up as authentic in everything that they do and embody the very behaviors they expect of their teams. One of

the individual contributors interviewed, a Compensation and Talent Consultant based in Chicago, IL, mentioned how much they value their leader modeling humility to the team,

> One of the things that the leader of my group does really well is to just show humility. So, when something doesn't go as planned, [they] just own it and say, 'You know what, we thought that this was going to happen, and it didn't… And here's what it means… And here's how we plan to fix it.' Like that level of humanity, I think it makes a huge difference- [their] ability to connect with us as humans and also [their] workforce.

Collaborator, coach, and active listener. Four of six individual contributors interviewed viewed leaders as collaborators, coaches, and thought partners. They believed that a leader should keep open lines of communication with their team and actively listen to what their team has to say. A leader should hold space to listen and act as a sounding board when necessary. Individual contributors believe that the communication line should not be solely top-down, but leaders should also enable horizontal and bottom-up communication within and outside the team.

Q2. Change agility definitions. All interviewees defined change agility in terms of two key areas: attitude towards change and responsiveness to change. Beyond these initial areas, individual contributors also defined change agility in terms of someone's direction and intention.

Attitude towards change. To 10 of the 12 interviewees, change agility is considered a mindset. Instead of seeing the world as stable and valuing that sense of stability, individuals who are agile view consistently anticipated change and saw it as a normal part of growth and evolution. The status quo was viewed as a negative or, at the

very least, incredibly temporary. They should pay attention to what is happening in the environment, observe trends and patterns, and know how to separate noise and distraction from reality. Individuals who are change agile should had a desire to consistently evolve and innovate. They identified a better way and shifted to get there. Instead of being glued to a specific path, someone who is change agile demonstrated flexibility in paths and methods used for goal achievement. Instead of planning with a sense of permanence, they focused on direction.

Responsiveness to change. According to nine of the interviewees, change agility required an ability to be adaptable to whatever happens. It is an ability to adapt and quickly shift. Change agility means an ability to try new things, analyze results, and pivot as necessary. When someone demonstrates change agility, they can change during change. It is an intentional responsiveness versus an instant knee-jerk reaction.

One of the interviewees, a director at a manufacturing company based in Milwaukee, WI, connected change agility and how they see their role as a leader supporting it,

> I mean, when I think of change agility, I kind of subscribe to that adage [that] change is inevitable, the only constant is change. Agility, I think, is reducing the time to high performance in a new change environment, because there is always going to be a [new change environment]. I think it's foolish to ever say that change has to happen overnight because it never will. You are dealing with real people. So, I [focus on] what can I do to reduce that time in flux, reduce that time of uncertainty, help people adapt faster, and return to previous operating levels if

not exceed those previous operating levels in this new environment or

process/people/technology?

A Client Services leader at a large manufacturing organization also shared how they view

change:

It is a little bit of responsiveness versus reaction. It's really important to try to be

as anticipatory as possible. You may not get it perfectly right. You likely won't.

However, it's paying attention to trends and patterns and looking around the

corner. It's recognizing some of those indicators that are telling you that there will

be some shifts or a continued shift and then doing some sensemaking around that

[…] That enables you to then respond appropriately. […] I think it is coming at it

from a place of inquiry and understanding where we are trying to get to and what

is happening so that you can make sense of it. To me it is being able to pivot. It is

the ability to shift. What are the steps, actions, and the behavioral shift I need to

make?

Q3. Teams at their best during change. Both subsets of interviewees were

asked to define what their teams looked like when at their best during a change. This

helped to define what each individual's best-case scenario looked like for a team during

change. Across all interviewees, three main themes emerged: 1) collaboration and

teaming, 2) energy and excitement, and 3) a willingness to do things differently. Further,

the individual contributor group also defined communication as a key attribute.

Collaboration and teaming. When a team is at its best, according to eight of the

interviewees, they actively collaborated with each other. Team members exhibited a

sense of trust with one another, displayed authenticity, and showed compassion for one

another. They felt comfortable engaging in healthy debate and conflict. They recognized one another for their accomplishments and contributions.

Interviewees shared that their team showed deep support for one another when they were at their best. They checked in on one another. They knew where each other were, emotionally, with the change. They supported and encouraged one another. They showed emotional vulnerability with one another. One individual contributor interviewed expanded upon their view of this support by saying:

> When we are at our best, it shows up in a few ways, but honestly, it is just simple care for each other. Just human care for each other. I think affirming each other, supporting each other, being present for each other, encouragement. It is people pitching in to help and do what they can you. [Essentially], I would just say when we're going through change and work, thinking about each other and checking in with each other. But yeah, there is just a sense of care.

Energy and excitement. Seven interviewees mentioned that there was a palpable energy and sense of excitement when the team was at its best. There was a perceived sense of heighted engagement. Team members seemed to laugh more, smile more, and have more fun with one another. They were willing to put in extra time and effort when needed and their commitment to goal achievement was palpable.

Willingness to do things differently. During a change, a team is at its best when there was an openness to explore alternatives and a willingness to try new approaches. There was a proactive mentality to unearth new opportunities. The team is less likely to feel overwhelmed by change and instead sees change as an opportunity. The team comes up with new ideas, innovations, and experiments. They also felt the freedom to voice

those ideas and opportunities to leaders, as well as take ownership and accountability over those ideas. A team leader based in Chicago shared some of what they observed when their team is at its best:

> We will try just about anything. And so, you know, somebody comes up with an idea, and they know that they don't have to do things the way that I would always do them. And when we talk about different things, there's just freedom. I have one guy on my team. It just cracks me up all the time because he says, 'I have got another crazy idea.' And they are always crazy ideas. But so many of them are just fun and so we go ahead and try them. And sometimes we crash and burn, but I think that's the thing. As an organization, how much you can experiment and innovate will be [affected] by how you deal with the ideas that fail. […] And just acknowledge that and take about what we can learn from this.

Communication. Eight participants suggested that communication was an important aspect of a team when it is at its best. The team engaged in active listening with one another to understand perspectives, viewpoints, and ideas. They held the space for one another to discuss the change and ensured that every voice was heard. The team also proactively shared information with one another.

Q4. Individuals at their best during change. Tangentially, the interviewees were also asked to define how they view themselves when they are at their best during a change. The overarching themes included: 1) energy and excitement and 2) clarity. Additionally, team leaders also highlighted their intentionality during a change.

Energy and excitement. At their best during a change, seven of the interviewees reported that they were fully engaged. They not only engaged with projects, their roles,

and new opportunities, but they were also fully engaged with those around them. They shared that they had a high energy level and an underlying sense of excitement. They felt as though they were in a better mood, more prone to laughter, and felt more connected to their team.

Clarity. Both individual contributors and team leaders exhibited a sense of clarity when they were at their best during a change. They felt connected to the change and had a sense of purpose. They knew enough about the change to move forward. The interviewees shifted from a sense of uncertainty to understanding how the change impacted the ecosystem and saw the value within the change itself. One team leader in a manufacturing environment shared how this sense of focus and clarity affected them:

> I think I am at my best when I can see the value. It is probably pretty aligned with my coworkers. Especially, when I can see the difference in how it will affect the others. Once I can see the value, then I get energetic about how to get from point A to B. I get solely focused on how to solve that riddle. I will drop other things. I have this breakthrough and need to work through the details. I get solely focused, where I'm even thinking about it at dinner time and going to bed.

Essentially, they understood how they fit within the broader scheme of things and were clear on how their role provided value. They had a sense of confidence and pride within their work and their contribution to the broader organization.

Intentionality. All team leaders interviewed expressed how their intentions shifted when they were their best during a change. Instead of being reactionary to change or panicking, they took control of the change. They viewed the change more as an opportunity than as something to fear or be concerned over. The leaders built in time for

themselves to reflect individually, as well as time for the team to reflect together. They choose to flex their creativity instead of resorting to old habits or ways of working. An individual contributor at a retail company based in Seattle shared how this intention shows up for them:

> I am more reflective. Instead of just going into it saying, 'Oh, yeah, I can do this. It is not going to be an issue. It will not affect me that much.' I will intentionally sit back and reflect on how it actually affects me and think about how I want to show up differently. I look at the opportunity and how I can be more intentional and strategic about my role within the change. When I'm not at my best, I tend to think, 'Oh, this does not affect me that much, I will be ok. I am not one who is that emotional or attached to things.' When, in reality, that is maybe not as much as accurate as I would like to believe.

Q5. Consistent practices. When reflecting upon the practices that leaders do consistently, three key focus areas emerged: 1) communication and translation, 2) normalization of change and discomfort, and 3) the aspects of the team that build change capacity.

Communication and translation. 11 participants stated that communication was an important part of building change agility within their team. Communication often encompassed consistent check-ins and creating space for dialogue. Ideally, the leader would make themselves available for questions and to act as a sounding board for the team. Communication also involved top-down, peer-to-peer, and bottom-up information flow.

When a leader communicates effectively, they are also helping to reduce noise in the system. As mentioned previously, the leader makes sense of what is happening in the organization and helps translate that to the team. They help shed light on connecting the team's work to the broader organization. The leader helps ensure that the team priorities align to the broader organizational priorities.

Normalization of change and discomfort. Five participants interviewed reported that they either normalized change for their teams or have observed the leader normalize change. According to these interviewees, this has been an immensely helpful practice in their building change capability in members. This normalization practice can take a variety of different forms. Consistent conversation around change is a start. Additionally, the leader often provided the team with language to normalize the change curve they may experience during change. By consistently stretching the team and having individuals and the team move beyond their comfort zone, the leader helped normalize the sense of discomfort that may arise. Through consistent stretching of their comfort zone, the team became more equipped to handle unexpected change activities.

By consistently scanning the environment, the team anticipated what change may be coming and engaged in dialogue around what they were seeing or hearing. The leader helped reinforce that change will always happen and it is a normal part of an organization and team's evolution.

Aspects of teams to build change capacity. Interestingly, team leaders and individual contributors highlighted different aspects of teams that build change capacity. The leaders focused on empowering and involving the team, whereas the individual

contributors focused more on care for the team and how the leader showed up for the team.

Four team leaders suggested that they intentionally involved their team members in the change. They provided decision-making capability to individuals on the team and empowered them to fully own their roles and the decisions that impacted their role. They sought out the subject matter experts in change and ensured their perspectives were accounted for. The leaders spent more time consistently with the people doing the work to understand their viewpoints and engaged in dialogue around both the current work and what they anticipated in the future.

The leaders also reported that they provided space and opportunity for their teams to take on stretch projects and engaged with other teams on cross-functional initiatives. Tangentially, the team leaders engaged in consistent retrospective activities with their teams to see what's working currently and ways to continue to improve. An example from a team leader at a retail company shared what they believe their organization does well:

> The other thing that I would say we do a lot of here is what we call roundtables. Essentially, it is bringing teams together and finding out (often skip-level conversations with a VP and the district managers- which are generally two levels below) how folks feel about what we are doing well, what is not working, and if we could go back, what should we do differently. It is a lot of those types of questions to check and adjust along the way.

The individual contributors reported that the team practices they observed the leaders doing that are most impactful included the leader modelling transparency and humility

and encouraging the same within the team. They also found it helpful when the team showed a willingness to support one another and see each other as whole people versus just fulfilling a role.

Q6. Desired practices. When the interviewees were asked about what practices they would like to do with their teams to build change capacity, both team leaders and individual contributors highlighted 1) communication, 2) feedback, reinforcement, and recognition, and 3) development and capability building. Additionally, team leaders reported a desire to engage in more consistent change normalization practices.

Communication. Both team leaders and individual contributors would love to see far more consistent communication. They expressed a desire for the leader to provide direction based on what they are hearing from their leaders. According to one individual contributor in Seattle, "Even if it is not the end state or where we end up, I would love to at least have a sense of the direction we are going. I would love to at least understand the ideal end state." Additionally, the interviewees specifically asked for transparency in all communication: if the leader does not know an answer to a question, it is perfectly acceptable to admit that they do not know, or that they do and cannot say. The Phoenix-based team leader shared what she hopes to do more of related to transparency:

> That's been one of the things that as leaders we try to do – I am providing the why and being really transparent. And I think sometimes leaders miss sharing the why they are not as transparent as they could be around the changes. I find that giving the why and being truthful around what the why is, involving, and being transparent with people is really important. I mean, obviously there is going to be times where you cannot be as transparent, maybe there is something you know

that that you cannot share for material reasons or whatever during the time

leading up to the change. But that is one thing I would say, I have always been

super proud to work here. […] I think it is important because it builds trust. I

think when you have trust change is easier to accept the change in direction or the

change in general. And if I trust the leadership and the direction, then I will be

more willing to go along on the journey.

Interviewees commented they would love to see additional communication happen

consistently at all levels, examples being roundtables or skip-level meetings.

Feedback, recognition, and reinforcement. Six participants explicitly highlighted

a desire for consistent feedback and reinforcement. For the interviewees, feedback took a

variety of forms. For individual contributors, there was a desire for more consistent

feedback. Beyond feedback from leaders, team members indicated interest in having a

360-degree feedback approach to ensure they heard from multiple relevant stakeholders.

Additionally, they wanted the opportunity to provide feedback to leadership on various

initiatives and organizational directions.

Team leaders expressed a desire to consistently reinforce agile behavior. They

wanted to design performance feedback to reward being nimble. Team leaders wanted to

normalize (or even ceremonialize) failure. They wanted to recognize and reinforce

experimentation and focus on learning opportunities. Additionally, they wanted to

manage by values versus priorities, recognizing that priorities may shift. To support this,

they wanted to reinforce and recognize appropriate value-driven behavior.

Development and capability building. Seven participants wanted to further empower their team members to take on additional tasks and make decisions. Three leaders focused primarily on the individual as the target of development and capability building (and subsequently upping the skill level of the team), whereas four of the individual contributors indicated a desire for both individual and team development (such as team-building activities). They wanted the team to have additional autonomy and freedom to pivot as the environment required. However, in order to appropriately empower the teams, there was a strong desire for capability building and development. Ideally, this would involve both individual and team development. According to one leader at a manufacturing company in Detroit,

> I want to ensure my team has mastery and purpose in what they do. It has been hard to find time outside of our normal day to day work to focus on that. However, in the next couple of months, we may have some additional time. I want to dedicate that time to focus on learning new tools that they can use day in and day out- and that will not only help them for their current role, but where they are going in the future.

From a team development perspective, this could include problem-solving exercises, scenario planning, and dedicated time for teambuilding. An individual contributor with significant experience in leading change efforts shared his perspective on team-building by sharing, "I think that team-building and team development exercises are an important thing for both teams and change. Teams make the change happen, so teams that are better able to work together for a productive result are going to attack the change in a better

way." Individual contributors wanted to see more consistent personal-development check-ins with their leaders.

    Normalization of change and discomfort. Five team leaders expressed a desire to be more intentional about normalizing change. Their perception was that change continues to be seen as a one-time event or something that is surprising. However, this continued to create difficulty for the team in adapting to change or proactively evolving. Team leaders wanted to continue to provide language around change activities so that they understood where they may fall on the change curve and support each other through the consistent evolution of an organization.

    Team leaders also highlighted that they wanted to dedicate time to be intentional around change and unpack what was happening in the environment. They wanted to see forums for individuals in order to connect in intentional dialogue and create shared meaning around what they are observing around them, think through scenarios that could happen, and act in a way that anticipates what is to come.

Summary

    This chapter outlined the results of the research interviews and summarized key themes. Chapter 5 will conclude this study by discussing the research findings, considering if the research findings refute or support the content covered in the literature review, summarize implications for practice, hypothesize the impact of this research on the field of Organization Development, discuss limitations, and recommend areas for future examination.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Purpose

The purpose of this research was to determine ways for managers to improve change agility within their team members. To explore this, the research intended to find answers to three primary questions:

1. How do leaders and individual contributors define the role of a leader?
2. What do individuals observe about themselves and their team when they are at their best during a change?
3. What are practical ways a leader can build change agility into a team that better prepares that team to respond to constant change?

This chapter will summarize the research findings, review the study conclusions, provide recommendations to people leaders and Organization Development practitioners, highlight limitations of this study, and explore options for future research. While the findings of the study do not provide definitive answers, they did provide valuable insight into how individuals define the role of a leaders, how individuals observe themselves while at their best during a change, and practical ways that a leader can build change agility.

Summary

The 12 interviews conducted for this research study yielded approximately 22 key themes across six questions. The six questions related to the interviewees' beliefs on the role of a leader, definitions of change agility, how they viewed themselves and their

teams when they are at their best during a change, and consistent and desired practices that are used to build change agility.

The interviewees believe that the role of a leader is to 1) challenge and empower their employees, 2) communicate effectively and translate organizational level strategy, 3) act as an advocate for the team, and 4) advocate for change. The people leaders interviewed also believe that a leader should model authenticity and act as a servant leader. Additionally, the individual contributors believe that leaders should be collaborators, coaches, and actively listen to the members of their team.

Change agility was primarily defined in terms of two key areas: attitude towards change and responsiveness to change. Individual contributors also defined change agility by a person's direction and intention.

When asked to define what their teams look like when at their best during a change, three main themes emerged: 1) collaboration and teaming, 2) energy and excitement, and 3) a willingness to do things differently. Additionally, the individual contributor group also defined communication as a key attribute. The interviewees were also asked to define how they view themselves when at their best during a change. Those overarching themes included: 1) energy and excitement and 2) clarity. Team leaders also highlighted their intentions during a change.

Both subgroups were asked to reflect upon the practices that leaders do consistently to provide their teams with greater capacity for change. Three key focus areas emerged: 1) communication and translation, 2) normalization of change and discomfort, and 3) teams.

When the interviewees were asked about what practices they would like to do with to build change capacity, both team leaders and individual contributors highlighted 1) communication, 2) feedback, reinforcement, and recognition, and 3) development and capability building. The people leaders also reported a desire to engage in more consistent change normalization practices.

Conclusions

The findings from this research study do not appear to contradict the various assertions discovered in the literature review. However, the research findings do provide additional clarity on what practices may be most impactful. The following section will explore some of the conclusions unearthed through the research.

Communication. Communication was the most often discussed theme throughout the interviews. Communication is a broad topic that encompasses many sub-themes, such as sensemaking and sensegiving, translation, sharing priorities, sharing information, ongoing dialogue, and more. Interviewees felt that while they may engage in communication consistently, the intent, clarity, and frequency all have opportunities to improve.

This is directly in line with existing literature that showcase factors to build agility. As O'Reilly III and Tushman (2014) share, a clear and compelling vision that is communicated to all employees provides a sense of value and common identity. It helps employees to position themselves and align their daily tasks and projects to contribute to that vision (Bahrami & Evans, 2011; McCann, Selsky, & Lee, 2009).

Additionally, clear communication ensures that employees understand where the company is heading. Through leaders then translating the direction within the lens of

their teams, they are helping the team to make sense of how their role aligns (Onderick-Harvey, 2018). In alignment with Wanberg and Banas (2000), by providing context, the leader provides employees with the bigger picture and an opportunity to learn patterns. By discussing context and patterns, the leader is instilling that capability within their team. By continuing to identify patterns, the team may be better poised to identify and anticipate the need for future change. Communication enables conversation and diverse perspectives. By allowing diversity of perspectives, variability in responses, and alternative viewpoints, the organization is further enabling agility (Bahrami & Evans, 2011).

Communication does not always have to be one-directional, nor should it be. Through inviting dialogue and creating space for discussion, the leader can enable different perspectives to be voiced, create shared meaning within the team, and hear from the people who are most closely tied to the work being done.

The role of the leader. The interviewees demonstrated a consistent view on the overall view of a leader. Both team leaders and individual contributors alike view the leader as someone who challenges and empowers and communicates consistently with employees and translates broader organizational strategy and priorities to make sense within the team's context, very similar to what Sparr (2018) outlines as sensemaking and sensegiving. Additionally, the leader is also seen as someone who advocates for the team as well as change.

It is helpful to understand that there are similar views of the role of the leader to operate from a baseline of shared expectations. A couple discrepancies are worth noting. For example, some of the team leaders believe that a leader should also act as an example

and model for their employees. Additionally, the individual contributors agreed with

Haneberg (2011) and Heckelman's (2017) assertion that team leaders should act as a

collaborator, coach, and active listener. For a leader to operate effectively, it is important

to understand what expectations may exist for the role both from an industry perspective

and from those within their own team. This information will also help to guide the

recommendations highlighted within this chapter.

Perspectives on change. Additionally, the interviewees all had tangible positive

experiences with change. Change does not need to be a painful process. In fact, based

upon these interviews, there are many examples of when change can be a multi-pronged,

positive experience. It provides an opportunity to move towards a greater future while

simultaneously supporting individual and team growth.

Both individual contributors and leaders expressed a sense of heightened energy

and engagement, clarity on the future direction on their role during the specific change, as

well as a willingness to do things differently. Team leaders also expressed that they have

the capacity and desire to be more intentional during a change. From a team perspective,

individual contributors and leaders alike expressed that the team's energy is palpable and

there is a collective sense of excitement. Additionally, there is intentional collaboration

and care for one another.

This could indicate that there is a significant opportunity within change to build

shared experiences, heighten collaboration, drive towards a prioritized future, minimize

distractors, and explore alternatives. All of these can enable further building of change

agility. As there is a neurological drive to conserve energy, the more often teams enable

positive change, the less embedded existing patterns of behavior may become and the less strain it will take to continue to shift (Hill, 2013; Hill, Cromartie, & McGinnis, 2017).

Empowerment and involvement of the team members. Four leaders interviewed reported that they consistently and intentionally empower and involve the individuals on their teams. These leaders indicated that they are consistently engaging with those doing the work and seeking out their perspectives. They provide decision-making capability to the team members and empower them to own their roles, as well as influence the broader organizational decisions that affect their roles. By providing opportunities for their team members to engage in cross-functional teams and/or stretch projects, they also encourage individuals on their team to build capability.

These practices reflect some of the recommendations found in existing literature. By providing individuals with decision-making power, the leader is reducing time and bureaucracy that can dilute the relevant information required for a project (Ates & Bitici, 2011). It instills a sense of transparency and trust in their employees (Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Haneberg, 2011). Through participation in cross-functional teams, leaders encourage cross-functional communication, diverse perspectives, and capability building (Bahrami & Evans, 2011; Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Warner, 2017). Stretch projects build a sense of trust within the employees and provides an opportunity to build capability and growth (Hill et al., 2017).

Teambuilding. While both individual contributors and leaders alike expressed a desire for more development and capability building, there was some disparity in their perspectives of what that could look like. The team leaders focused primarily on the individual as the target of the development. However, the individual contributors shared

that they would like to see both individual development as well as teambuilding and development. When budget cuts occur or when conflicting pressures arise, many individual contributors disclosed that teambuilding and development often get cut or postponed.

Existing research did highlight the importance of not only individual development, but also team development. This can be done through shared stretch goals, through the cross-functional teams mentioned above, or through specific team-building activities (Bahrami & Evans, 2011; Cappelli & Tavis, 2018; Warner, 2017). While the leaders interviewed did not expressly highlight team development as part of their desired or current practices, there is research evidence to support this as well as desire from their team members.

Recommendations to People Leaders

While every organization may look different, every team may have specific demands, and each environment may vary, existing literature and the findings highlighted throughout this research provide clarity on what activities leaders should focus on first.

Communication. Leaders and individual contributors alike crave more communication. Not only is there a desire for quantity with communication, but a demand for quality and clarity. Team leaders can play a significant role in ensuring communication is a priority within their team. Discussed below are a few areas that a leader can help build change capacity by focusing on communication:

Sensemaking and sensegiving. The leader is in a unique position to share with the team what they are hearing from other leaders in the organization. By providing visibility into the broader organizational strategy and translating that strategy to the team,

the leader is helping the team focus. To take it a step further, the leader should engage the team within the process of translating the strategy. This will not only build commitment for the organizational strategy, but it will also build translating capability within the team members.

Ongoing dialogue. Beyond engaging the team members in translating the organizational strategy and direction, the leader should engage the team in ongoing dialogue to make sense of what is going on around them and build shared meaning. The individuals on the team are not only closer to the work, but they also have access to information the leader may not. By listening to the team and asking questions, the leader is not only supporting the team and involving them, but also gaining access to information that is likely relevant to share both above and across. Roundtables and skip-level meetings are an additional way to ensure that team information is not getting lost in translation between layers of management.

Transparency. Teams yearn for transparency. Even when a leader may not have access to all information or know all the answers, they have an opportunity to build trust by sharing the information that they do have. Whether it is sharing all the information they have, sharing that they do have information that they cannot share, or sharing negative news transparently, individual contributors appreciate knowing as much as the leader can share. Information that is provided to individuals in one-on-one meetings, small team meetings, individual emails, or email threads without all participants can decrease transparency. Consider the mode, method, frequency, and audience of communication to ensure it enables transparency as much as possible.

Normalization of change and discomfort. Team leaders and individual contributors alike acknowledged that they have either been intentional about leading or have participated in efforts to normalize change and discomfort. However, there is a strong desire for more focused effort and impact in this space. Through a few activities, such as those outlined below, leaders can normalize change and minimize negative impact.

Provide change language. By labeling feelings instead of dismissing them, and ensuring that teams understand how to progress, the leaders can help teams build change capacity. By recognizing where others may be on the curve, leaders and team members can help support each other. Change language should be communicated often- and not only during times of disruptive change. Through consistent reinforcement, leaders are enabling their teams to label emotions and have a stronger sense of agency in progressing through the curve.

Environmental sensemaking. Team leaders can help normalize change through consistent sense-making discussions of what is happening in the environment. Hold periodic discussions to understand what the team is seeing externally. Based on what is happening in the external environment, ask the team what they believe could be the impact on them and how they could proactively position themselves to handle it. Find out if there is anything the team believes they could and should be doing differently. Allow them to own any actions that arise as a result of the sensemaking discussion.

Team leaders also highlighted that they would like to dedicate time to be intentional around change and unpacking what is happening in the environment. They would love to see forums for individuals to connect together in intentional dialogue and

create shared meaning around what they are observing around them, think through scenarios that could happen, and act in a way that anticipates what is to come. This allows the team to feel a sense of ownership and agency in their future direction- and instills a desire for consistent evolution.

Feedback, recognition, and reinforcement. Reinforce and recognize behaviors and activities the support agility. Determine what behaviors are important for not only the short-term, but for long-term sustainability. Consider behaviors that support agility, such as experimentation, error-learning, environment scanning, communication, curiosity, listening, and willingness to explore alternatives.

Leaders and individual contributors desire specific and consistent feedback. Evaluate what current methods are in existence for feedback. Are they exhaustive? Are they driven by an annual performance review? Or is feedback provided consistently through multiple methods? Consider ways to ensure feedback is offered throughout the year and that it is provided from multiple sources. Feedback should not only be provided to individual contributors, but also for leaders. Build in opportunities for feedback at all levels. Feedback is a great way to recognize behavior that is either serving to build change capacity or is detrimental. If it is detrimental, it is important to recognize early and offer opportunities for the individual to redirect that energy towards desired behaviors.

Development and capability building. Through the process of environmental scanning and ongoing conversations, it is likely that skills and capabilities will be identified that the team does not possess currently. Invest time, effort, and resources to enable the team to build those skills. If an individual person is taking a class or building

a specific skill, recommend that they share with the others on their team. Encourage

rotational opportunities to ensure that information is cross-pollinated between other

teams.

While it may be natural to focus on individual development, it is also important to

consider opportunities for teambuilding and team development. Teams that understand

each other, know each other's strengths and weaknesses, and have participated in various

problem-solving activities are better equipped to work together during disruptive change.

Try not to minimize or underestimate the impact that team development can have.

Recommendations to OD Practitioners

The primary focus of this research was to understand ways that a leader can build

change agility within their teams. However, there are implications for Organization

Development (OD) practitioners to leverage the findings from this research as well. The

top practices identified that support building change agility are discussed below:

communication; normalization of change and discomfort; and feedback, recognition, and

reinforcement

1. Communication. OD practitioners can take stock of how communication is

currently happening within the organization and the team. They can identify if it is top-

down only, if the leader does a good job at translating the organization's priorities and

direction, if messages are getting diluted in translation, if the leader is transparent with

the team, if there are feedback mechanisms in place to enable bottom-up and peer-to-peer

communication, and if there are opportunities to engage in dialogue with diverse groups

of the organization. If the OD practitioner identifies misalignment in any of these factors,

there is great opportunity to coach the leader and the teams to make changes as

appropriate for unit's context. As an example, they can facilitate dialogue and/or help create safe places to engage in sensemaking.

2. Normalization. OD practitioners can share with leaders and their teams what they see happening external to the organization. Through their knowledge of the change curve, understanding of the tensions and discomfort some folks feel during change, and exposure to the broader organizational context, OD professionals can help normalize change. Occasionally, an external person that can recognize and verbalize what they are observing can help legitimize the experience of the team. The OD practitioner should note when a team's experience appears to be diminished or minimized, or when the team lacks understanding of change. The OD professional can then advise the organization's leaders on approaches to normalize change through building of common language awareness and understanding.

3. Feedback, recognition, and reinforcement. Additionally, OD practitioners can help coach and advise leaders by providing methods and tools for them to use when they give feedback, recognition, and reinforcement. There are multiple practices to pay close attention to such as: opportunities for peer-to-peer feedback, ways for team members to provide feedback to their leader, ensuring the performance management system allows leaders to recognize individuals for agile behavior, identifying if team members are punished for experiments that fail or if recognized for being innovative, and determining if feedback is consistent or sporadic. When practices are not aligned to reinforcing change agility, OD professionals should identify the gaps and recommend alternatives.

Limitations

There are limitations to this study that are worth noting. First, there were only 12 people interviewed, which is a small sample built around the researcher's network and network connections. Each of the 12 interviewees did express passion around the subject of change agility or were identified as participants based upon their potential interest in the study subject. This may be indicative of a positive bias surrounding change agility. Second, although the researcher took precautionary measures to ensure objectivity, there is room for error based on the conversation flow, follow-up questions, and interpretation of participant answers. Third, the interview questions were open-ended, and responses depended on what the interviewee deemed relevant or remembered. For example, there may have been practices that a team leader regularly did to build change agility, but the individual contributor may not have recognized the activity or remembered it during the interview. An outside coder could have looked at the data to ensure reliability.

Suggestions for Future Research

Organizations, leaders, and teams will likely derive value from additional research on change agility. First, to expand the depth and breadth of data, it would be helpful to do a large-scale global survey. This could compliment the findings of this initial study and provide additional data points to develop a more holistic picture. It would also highlight where practices may differ by country, region, or culture.

Second, to provide clarity on differences between industries, more research should be done within and across specific industries. This could both help identify if there are practices that are most impactful for a specific industry and how industries compare to one another.

Third, it could be helpful to understand if there are companies that are particularly successful at building change agility within their teams. Once identified, an additional study could be done to understand what those companies are doing differently and the impact of those practices.

Final Notes

Change agility is important. Between the time these interviews were conducted and the conclusions outlined, the world shifted due to the coronavirus. Companies were forced to re-evaluate how they conduct business. Organizations needed to shift how they got work done. Teams that had never worked remotely were forced to consider telecommuting options. This is the epitome of disruptive change: it was unforeseen, nearly impossible to forecast, and required urgent responses. For those teams that have not engaged in building change agility, this time may have been particularly disruptive. For others, while still disruptive, the teams may have felt better prepared and equipped to respond.

Through the literature review and interviews, it is clear that change agility is necessary and that people are talking about it and looking for ways to be proactive towards change. Through the practices outlined, such as transparent communication, normalizing change, feedback, clear reinforcement, and development, team leaders can play a significant role in ensuring their teams position themselves to be successful no matter what scenario comes their way.

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Appendix A: Individual Contributor Interview Questions

1. Demographic questions:

   o Company industry:

   o Company size:

   o Public or non-profit?

   o Location

   o Role in company

   o Length of time at company? In specific role? Years of professional experience?

2. Describe the culture of your organization and your team.

3. How many significant changes have you and your team undergone in the past 2-3 years?

4. In what form did the changes occur? Were they organizational, technological, process-oriented, other?

5. What was the impact on you?

6. What does change agility mean to you?

7. What does the role of a leader look like for you?

8. Did you feel prepared for the change? How about your team? In your opinion, did it appear they felt prepared?

9. What type of activities, if any, did you observe your leader do to prepare and support you *leading up to* the change?

10. What type of activities, if any, did you observe your leader do to support you *during* the change?

11. What type of activities, if any, did you observe your leader do to support you *following the change?*

12. When your team is at its best during a change, what do you observe about your team?

13. When you are at your best during a change, what do you observe about yourself?

14. Are there any consistent practices or activities that you have observed your leader doing that have provided you with a greater capacity for change?

15. What practices or activities do you wish your leader would do with you and your team to build your capacity for change?

Appendix B: Team Leader Questions

1. Demographic questions:

   o Company industry:

   o Company size:

   o Public or non-profit?

   o Location

   o Role in company

   o Length of time at company? In specific role? Years of professional experience?

2. Describe the culture of your organization and your team.

3. How many significant changes have you and your team undergone in the past 2-3 years?

4. In what form did the changes occur? Were they organizational, technological, process-oriented, other?

5. What was the impact on you?

6. What does change agility mean to you?

7. What does the role of a leader look like for you?

8. Did you feel prepared for the change? How about your team? In your opinion, did it appear they felt prepared?

9. What type of activities, if any, did you do to prepare and support your team *leading up to* the change?

10. What type of activities, if any, did you do to prepare and support your team *during* the change?

11. What type of activities, if any, did you do to prepare and support you team *following the change?*

12. When your team is at its best during a change, what do you observe about your team?

13. When you are at your best during a change, what do you observe about yourself?

14. Are there any consistent practices or activities that you have done to provide your team with a greater capacity for change?

15. What practices or activities would you like to do with your team to build capacity for change?