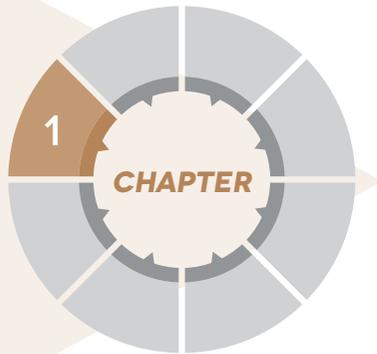


CONTENTS

<i>List of figures and tables</i>	ix
<i>List of research reports and change tools</i>	xi
<i>About the author</i>	xii
<i>Preface and acknowledgements</i>	xiii
<i>Tour of the book</i>	xviii
<i>Online teaching and learning resources</i>	xx
<i>Managing change in practice: video and text feature</i>	xxi
<i>Employability skills</i>	xxiii
<i>Case studies and examples grid</i>	xxviii
<i>Publisher's acknowledgements</i>	xxxi
Part I <i>Managing change: a process perspective</i>	1
1 Process models of change	4
2 Leading change: a process perspective	20
II <i>Recognizing the need for change and starting the change process</i>	41
3 Patterns of change	44
4 Recognizing a need or opportunity for change	66
5 Starting the change	86
6 Building change relationships	99
III <i>Diagnosing what needs to be changed</i>	117
7 Diagnosis	120
8 Gathering and interpreting information	141
IV <i>Leading and managing the people issues</i>	157
9 The role of leadership in change management	163
10 Power, politics and stakeholder management	185
11 Responsible change management: an ethical approach	201
12 Managing context to promote ethical practice	215
13 Communicating change	224
14 Motivating others to change	244
15 Supporting others through change	265

V	<i>Planning and preparing for change</i>	279
16	Shaping implementation strategies	287
17	Developing a change plan	304
18	Types of intervention	319
19	Action research	341
20	Appreciative inquiry	351
21	Training and development	365
22	High performance management	374
23	Business process re-engineering	385
24	Lean	394
25	Culture profiling	408
26	Value innovation	420
27	Selecting interventions	430
VI	<i>Implementing change and reviewing progress</i>	441
28	Implementing change	443
29	Reviewing and keeping the change on track	457
VII	<i>Sustaining change</i>	469
30	Making change stick	471
31	Spreading change	481
VIII	<i>Learning</i>	489
32	Change managers learning from their own experience	491
33	Facilitating collective learning	501
34	Pulling it all together: a concluding case study	515
	<i>Author index</i>	517
	<i>Subject index</i>	522



PROCESS MODELS OF CHANGE

Change managers, at all levels, have to be competent at identifying the need for change. They also have to be able to act in ways that will secure change. While those leading change may work hard to deliver improvements, there is a widely accepted view that up to 60 per cent of change programmes fail to achieve targeted outcomes (Beer et al., 1990; Jørgensen et al., 2008). Getting it ‘wrong’ can be costly. It is imperative, therefore, that those responsible for change get it ‘right’, but getting it ‘right’ is not easy. Change agents, be they managers or consultants, are often less effective than they might be because they fail to recognize some of the key dynamics that affect outcomes and therefore do not always act in ways that enable them to exercise sufficient control over what happens.

This chapter examines change from a process perspective, that is, the ‘how’ of change and the way a transformation occurs. After reviewing the similarities and differences between various process theories, attention is focused on reactive and self-reinforcing sequences of events, decisions and actions and how they affect change agents’ ability to achieve intended goals. It is argued that in order to minimize any negative impact from these sequences, those leading change need to be able to step back and observe what is going on, including their own and others’ behaviour, identify critical junctures and subsequent patterns – some of which may be difficult to discern – and explore alternative ways of acting that might deliver superior outcomes.

States and processes

Open systems theory provides a framework for thinking about organizations (and parts of organizations) as a system of interrelated components that are embedded in, and strongly influenced by, a larger system. The key to any system’s prosperity and long-term survival is the quality of the fit (state of alignment) between the internal components of that system, for example the alignment between an organization’s manufacturing technology and the skill set of the workforce, and between this system and the wider system of which it is a part, for example the alignment between the organization’s strategy and the opportunities and threats presented by the external environment. Schneider et al. (2003, p. 125) assert that internal and external alignment promote organizational effectiveness because, when aligned, the various components of a system reinforce rather than disrupt each other, thereby minimizing the loss of system energy (the ‘get-up-and-go’ of an organization) and resources. Effective leaders are those who set a direction for change and influence others to achieve goals that improve internal and external alignment.

Miles and Snow (1984) argue that instead of thinking about alignment as a state (because perfect alignment is rarely achieved), it is more productive to think of it as a process that involves a quest for the best possible fit between the organization and its

environment and between the various internal components of the organization. Barnett and Carroll (1995) elaborate the distinction between states and processes. The state (or content) perspective focuses attention on ‘what’ it is that needs to be, is being or has been changed. The process perspective, on the other hand, attends to the ‘how’ of change and focuses on the way a transformation occurs. It draws attention to issues such as the pace of change and the sequence of activities, the way decisions are made and communicated, and the ways in which people respond to the actions of others. Change managers play a key role in this transformation process.

The change process

On the basis of an extensive interdisciplinary review of the literature, Van de Ven and Poole (1995) found over 20 different process theories. Further analysis led them to identify four ideal types – teleological, dialectical, life cycle and evolutionary theories – that provide alternative views of the change process:

- *Teleological theories*: assume that organizations are purposeful and adaptive, and present change as an unfolding cycle of goal formulation, implementation, evaluation and learning. Learning is important because it can lead to the modification of goals or the actions taken to achieve them.
- *Dialectical theories*: focus on conflicting goals between different interest groups and explain stability and change in terms of confrontation and the balance of power between the opposing entities.
- *Life cycle theories*: assume that change is a process that progresses through a necessary sequence of stages that are cumulative, in the sense that each stage contributes a piece to the final outcome, and related – each stage is a necessary precursor for the next.
- *Evolutionary theories*: posit that change proceeds through a continuous cycle of variation, selection and retention. Variations just happen and are not therefore purposeful, but are then selected on the basis of best fit with available resources and environmental demands. Retention is the perpetuation and maintenance of the organizational forms that arise from these variations via forces of inertia and persistence.

A common feature of all four theories is that they view change as involving a number of events, decisions and actions that are connected in some sort of sequence, but they differ in terms of the degree to which they present change as following certain essential stages and the extent to which the direction of change is constructed or predetermined.

The ordering of stages

Some theories place more emphasis on the order of the stages in the change process than others. For example, life cycle theories are more prescriptive about this than teleological theories. Flamholtz (1995) asserts that organizations progress through seven stages of development from new venture to decline and possible revitalization. He argues that at each stage of development, the criteria of organizational effectiveness change. The major concern during the first stage of the organization’s life cycle is survival and critical areas for development are markets and products. In the second stage, resources are often stretched and operating systems become overwhelmed, so resource management and the development of operating systems emerge as key tasks. The third stage of the life cycle is the point where more formal management systems, such as planning and management development, are required to ensure the long-term functioning of the business, and so on through the seven stages of the life cycle.

Teleological theories are less prescriptive about the ordering of stages. They present development and change as a repetitive sequence of goal formulation, implementation and evaluation, leading to the modification of an envisioned end state based on what was learned or intended by the people involved (Van de Ven and Sun, 2011, p. 61). While each of these stages is important and there is a logical sequence connecting them, the sequence does not have to, and often does not, unfold in a way that follows the ordered linear sequence presented above. For example, while an initial diagnosis may clarify a problem, it may fail to identify a desired end state, so the process may have to unfold in a tentative way that involves constant testing or some backtracking to earlier stages in order to achieve a valued outcome. Even when a goal can be specified at an early point in the process, it is not uncommon for unanticipated problems or new pressures for change to emerge and require attention even though the current change sequence has not been completed. Example 1.1 illustrates this point.

Example 1.1 A car importer responds to imposed change



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then moved on to purchase models from their range of inexpensive imported cars. An initial diagnosis indicated that the importer would have to encourage many of these dealers to refurbish and modernize their premises and, in some cases, relocate in order to attract the type of customer who would be interested in better quality, more expensive cars. Some dealers also had a relatively unsophisticated approach to selling, indicating a need for training and staff development. The importer quickly began to formulate a change strategy, but initial approaches to a sample of dealers to test out plans for change met with strong resistance.

An importer of value-for-money, low-cost cars had, over several years, built up a network of independent dealers to retail the vehicles to customers with relatively low disposable incomes. It was a successful business.

The manufacturer of the low-cost cars alerted the importer to a forthcoming change. In order to counter anticipated competition from even cheaper imported cars from India and China, it had decided to reposition its brand. It wanted to widen its market to include customers who normally bought more expensive vehicles, such as Ford or Opel. The manufacturer had already announced the launch of a new model that was technically superior to other cars in its range, but the new announcement made it clear that it intended to follow this up by rebranding and repositioning the entire range.

The importer quickly recognized that this would require a lot of changes to its own business. Many of the retailers who were part of its dealer network had started out selling second-hand cars. Their showrooms tended to be located in premises adjacent to their original petrol retailing or repair shop businesses. They had long-standing relationships with many of their customers who had first come to them to buy second-hand cars and

This triggered a rethink. The problem was reframed and another diagnostic exercise was undertaken to explore the possibility of replacing some of the existing dealers with dealers who were already selling more upmarket vehicles and who might be interested in either transferring their allegiance or taking on an additional brand and selling the imported cars alongside their existing range. When this strategy was tested, not many distributors of other brands showed much interest in transferring or diluting their allegiance, so this prompted yet a further rethink.

This third way forward involved working with some (maybe a majority) of the existing dealers to help them make the changes required to sell the rebranded cars and, alongside this approach, exploring the possibility of developing a new relationship with an Indian manufacturer of cheap cars. The plan was to establish a related business to import and distribute its vehicles using those dealers who were not prepared to move upmarket. Before plans to pursue this strategy were well advanced, a recession hit car sales, slowing plans to move the majority of dealers upmarket, and the Indian manufacturer announced a delay in its plans to launch its low-cost vehicles in European markets. These changes called for yet a further rethink of the situation.

Predetermined versus constructed trajectories

Van de Ven and Poole (1995) argue that life cycle and evolutionary theories present change as a predetermined process that unfolds over time in a prespecified direction. This kind of change involves incrementally adapting organizational forms in predictable ways. The process may be prescribed by some inherent code (as in biological evolution) or by the limits imposed by a wider system. Greenwood and Hinings (1996), for example, argue that an organization's institutional context can limit the possibilities for change, especially when the organization is embedded in a wider system that has tightly coupled relationships (see Chapter 3).

Teleological and dialectical theories, on the other hand, view change trajectories as constructed, in the sense that goals, and the steps taken to achieve goals, can be changed at the will of (at least some of) those involved in the process. According to this perspective, the process is not unduly constrained by an inherent code or factors external to the immediate system. Those leading the change have the power to intervene and act in ways that can make a real difference. The strategic choice framework, for example, asserts that one of the key factors determining the effectiveness of an organization is the quality of the strategic choices made by members of the dominant coalition who lead the organization. Teleological and dialectical theories highlight the role of human agency and assert that change agents can act to affect change in ways that will either promote or undermine organizational effectiveness.

The impact of sequence on outcome

Although teleological and dialectical theories suggest that members of a system have considerable freedom to construct change trajectories, and assert that it is possible for them to break away from established routines and intentionally move the system towards redefined goals, this may not always be easy to achieve in practice. The nature of the change sequence, whether reactive or self-reinforcing (see Mahoney, 2000 and the sections below), will affect the extent to which those leading the change will be able to realize this possibility.

A change process involves a number of events, decisions and actions that are connected in a sequence. They are connected in the sense that each event is influenced by earlier events and also helps to shape subsequent events. In the sequence $A > B > C > D > E$, event B is both a response to event A and a factor that shapes event C, which in turn effects D and so on. The way an earlier event will impact later events depends on how others respond.

Reactive sequences

Dialectical theories focus on the conflicting goals of those involved in a situation. These conflicts give rise to reactive sequences, in which one party challenges another party's attempt to secure a particular change. In reactive sequences, subsequent events challenge rather than reinforce earlier events. This is illustrated in Figure 1.1. A leader implements a decision (A) as the first step along the way to achieving a particular outcome (F). This action leads to responses (events B and C) that reinforce the leader's initial intention, but (in this example) this support is short-lived. The earlier events provoke a reaction from others, maybe because they see little or no benefit in the current direction of change. The outcome of this critical juncture is that the change is pushed in a new direction. But this new direction may not be sustained for long. In this example, it is challenged following event Y.

While those leading a change may attempt to avoid conflict by formulating a vision that accommodates the interests of many constituencies – bosses, peers, subordinates,

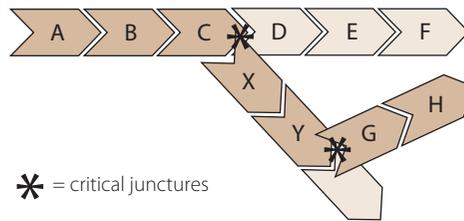


Figure 1.1 A reactive sequence

customers, suppliers, bankers – it may not always be possible to satisfy them all and some may resist the change. This highlights the importance of not only working to set a viable direction for change but also acting in ways that will align all those involved to support it.

In some cases, negative reactions may only lead to minor deviations from the leader's intended path but sometimes the reaction can block or radically transform the change. Mahoney (2000) refers to the possibility of a 'backlash', and Pierson (1998) observes that events can trigger counter-reactions that are powerful enough to move the system in a completely new direction. Example 1.1 provides a good illustration when the car dealers resisted the importer's plans for change. Example 1.2 presents another instance of this at British Airways.

Self-reinforcing sequences

Self-reinforcing sequences occur when a decision or action produces positive feedback that reinforces earlier events and supports the direction of change. This reinforcement induces further movement in the same direction. While self-reinforcing sequences can deliver benefits over the short term, change managers need to be alert

Example 1.2 BA cabin crew dispute

British Airways (BA) needed to change in order to compete against the increasing number of low-cost airlines, absorb rising fuel prices and adapt to the global recession.

The company announced changes in staffing levels, pay and conditions in order to cut costs. A number of changes were implemented, including some staff switching to part-time working and others taking voluntary redundancy, but a proposal to reduce the number of cabin crew on long-haul flights from 15 to 14 was fiercely resisted.

Actions and reactions, including strikes, suspensions and dismissals, continued for 18 months. Early on in the dispute, reactions escalated to the point where cabin crew decided on a 12-day strike over the Christmas holiday period. BA responded by taking legal action that prevented the strike from taking place. After two weeks of talks between BA management and Unite (the trade union representing cabin crew), the union decided to rebalot members

and the result was a vote in favour of strike action, starting with an initial 3-day strike. Following the strike, the company withdrew generous travel concessions from those workers who had participated in the industrial action.

Action and reaction continued to escalate the dispute. Three months later, after failing to reach a compromise with its staff, BA won a court injunction preventing a series of planned strikes. Talks to avert further action broke down when demonstrators stormed the building and the CEO had to be escorted away for his own protection. After more strikes and a bitter war of words, it was reported in the press that BA had suspended 80 cabin crew and sacked a further 13 because of incidents relating to the dispute, including the intimidation of cabin crew who wanted to continue working. Further votes for strike action and legal wrangling to prevent industrial action continued until, after almost 18 months, the dispute was eventually resolved.

to the possibility that they may draw them into a path that will deliver suboptimal outcomes over the longer term. This will be illustrated with reference to three drivers of self-reinforcing sequences: increasing returns, psychological commitment to past decisions, and cognitive biases.

Increasing returns

An important driver of self-reinforcing sequences is increasing returns, a concept that initially received attention from economists. Pierson (2000) traces early interest to Arthur (1994) and David (1985). They argued that a particular technology that is first to market or widely adopted by early users, for example the QWERTY keyboard and VHS video format, may generate increasing returns and achieve a decisive advantage over competing technologies, such as the Dvorak keyboard and Betamax video format, even though it may not be the most efficient alternative. Arthur (1994) points to four conditions that can promote increasing returns. These conditions are not restricted to the adoption and diffusion of new technologies, but apply to almost every aspect of organizational change:

- 1 *Set-up costs*: Where these are high, there is an incentive to stick with a chosen option so as to spread costs over a longer run of activity. For example, following the implementation of a new business process, increasing returns from the initial investment (set-up costs) are likely to be achieved if the new arrangements persist over a period of time.
- 2 *Learning*: Knowledge gained from repetitive use can lead to increased proficiency and continuous improvement. For example, organizational members learn by doing and the more they do, the more proficient they become. This learning provides a powerful incentive to continue down the same path because doing yet more of the same leads to increasing returns from exploiting these acquired competences. Switching to new ways of working might, at least in the short term, lead to diminishing returns while new competences are developed.
- 3 *Coordination*: The benefits received from a particular activity increase as others adopt the same option. Arthur observed that as more people bought VHS video recorders, video stores found it advantageous to stock VHS rather than Betamax tapes, which, in turn, encouraged more people to buy VHS recorders.
- 4 *Betting on the right horse*: People recognize that options that fail to win broad acceptance will have drawbacks later on, therefore they are motivated to select the option they think will be adopted by most others. They anticipate that persisting with this choice will generate increasing returns in the future.

Example 1.3 is an illustration of how increasing returns can create a situation where a company sticks with a winning formula too long and fails to respond to new opportunities and threats as they emerge.

This example illustrates the danger of increasing returns, which, in the case of Nokia, had led to too much attention being focused on devices. The company had missed the new big trend and was in danger of being squeezed out of what was fast becoming the most highly profitable segment of the market. Growing profits from hardware and Nokia's dominant position in the mobile phone market had undermined its long-term success. Not long after Elop's memo was circulated, Nokia announced a new strategic direction, which involved a partnership with Microsoft to build a new mobile ecosystem. Nokia also announced that the Windows Phone operating system would be its primary smartphone platform. However, this move failed to rescue the situation and, in 2014, Nokia sold its handset division to Microsoft, refashioned itself as a telecoms equipment maker and has now re-emerged as one of the largest telecom network providers (McKinsey, 2016).

Example 1.3 Nokia: sticking with a winning formula for too long



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Nokia started out as a wood pulp and paper manufacturer in 1865 and evolved into an industrial conglomerate producing rubber boots, cables, generators, military communications equipment, televisions and other consumer electronics. In 1992, the company changed strategy,

focusing on telecommunications and beginning to sell off its interests in other sectors. By 1998, this new focus plus the company's early investment in GSM (global system for mobile communication) technologies and second-generation mobile technology (which could carry both voice and data traffic) led to Nokia becoming the world's largest producer of mobile phones. Between 1996 and 2001, turnover increased from €6.5 to €31 billion and the growth in sales and profitability continued until 2008. Economies of scale, competences – especially in hardware design – and widespread consumer confidence all contributed to the company's success. New devices continued to be developed, including Nokia's first touch screen phone, released in 2007, and a phone with a full QWERTY keyboard to compete with BlackBerry devices, released in 2008. Nokia also developed phones with music and social networking

capabilities. However, research and development effort was focused on exploiting what Nokia was already good at rather than exploring new opportunities.

By 2011, the company employed 130,000 staff in 120 countries but in February of that year, Stephen Elop, the newly appointed CEO, circulated a speech alerting staff to an unfolding crisis which was subsequently picked up by many media sources (see Ziegler, 2011; Constantinescu, 2011; Arthur, 2011; Gee, 2011). He told them that consumers, while still valuing devices, were increasingly attracted by software and went on to argue that Apple had redefined the smartphone in a way that attracted developers to a closed but powerful ecosystem. It has 'changed the game, and today, Apple owns the high-end range'. He went on to talk about how the Android operating system had, in just two years, created a platform that attracted application developers, service providers and hardware manufacturers such as Samsung, and how Google had become 'a gravitational force, drawing much of the industry's innovation to its core'.

For almost two decades, hardware had delivered increasing returns and been the source of Nokia's profitability, but Elop argued that:

The battle of devices has now become a war of ecosystems, where ecosystems include not only the hardware and software of the device, but developers, applications, ecommerce, advertising, search, social applications, location-based services, unified communications and many other things. Our competitors aren't taking our market share with devices; they are taking our market share with an entire ecosystem.

Psychological commitment to past decisions

Another self-reinforcing mechanism is psychological commitment to past decisions. While most decision theories posit that individuals are prospectively rational and make decisions in order to maximize future benefit, Staw (1976, 1981) argues that, in practice, decision makers are often motivated by retrospective rationality and the need to justify past decisions. Staw (1976) observed that, when faced with negative outcomes following a decision, leaders may commit additional resources in order to justify the earlier decision and demonstrate the ultimate rationality of their original course of action. But the additional investment may not rescue the situation. Instead, it might lead to further negative consequences, which, in turn, trigger another decision to invest yet more in an attempt to secure a positive outcome. Staw refers to this negative cycle as the 'escalation of commitment' to a chosen course of action.

Two factors appear to encourage this escalation of commitment. The first is change managers' need to demonstrate their own competence and justify an earlier decision.

This can take the form of self-justification to protect their own self-image, or justification to others in order to prove to them that an earlier decision was not wrong. The second is a response to a perceived pressure for consistency. Staw (1981) argues that in many organizational settings there is a perception that change managers who are consistent in their actions are better leaders than those who switch from one course of action to another. Consistent change managers who persist with a course of action in the face of early setbacks are often viewed as being courageous, committed and steadfast, whereas those who monitor performance and, if results are not as good as anticipated, are prepared to change course can be seen to be indecisive and less effective.

These forces can encourage change managers to escalate their commitment to past decisions in the hope that this commitment will demonstrate that an apparent poor decision was actually a good decision when viewed over the long term. This self-reinforcing mechanism often makes it difficult to change course, even when those leading the change are aware that a series of past decisions have been suboptimal. Example 1.4 illustrates how the escalation of commitment contributed to the loss of £469 million when the FiReControl project failed.

Cognitive biases and interpretive frames

A change manager's implicit theory about how things work and selective perceptions about what is important can give rise to cognitive biases and idiosyncratic ways of interpreting events, which can push them to develop and persist with visions and goals for change that may be unfit for purpose. Conger (1990) suggests that while

Example 1.4 Failure of the FiReControl project

The FiReControl project involved replacing the control rooms in 46 local Fire and Rescue Services across England with a network of nine purpose-built regional control centres that were to be linked by a new national computer system. This new interlinked network was designed to enable fire brigades to be directed more easily to the scenes of large emergencies, such as terrorist attacks, industrial accidents, rail crashes or floods, and to improve national resilience. The project was launched with a budget of £70 million, but, following a series of delays and difficulties, was terminated several years later, with none of the original objectives achieved and a minimum of £469 million being wasted. Eight of the purpose-built centres had been empty for up to three years, at a cost of £4 million a month in maintenance, because the new computer system had not been delivered.

A number of Members of Parliament (MPs) on the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, although critical of the way the project was being managed, expressed the view that because so much money had already been spent, the project should continue and would eventually reap benefits. The Fire Brigades Union (FBU) disagreed and argued that to continue would involve 'throwing good money after

bad'. However, Shahid Malik, the then fire minister, backed the committee's view that the project should go ahead. Not everybody was happy with this recommendation. John McDonnell MP, FBU parliamentary group secretary, said on BBC Radio 4's *Face the Facts*:

It is very difficult for senior civil servants, ministers and secretaries of state to admit they have made a mistake ... What usually happens is rather than admit a mistake they throw more money at it and try to save the phenomenon.

Seven years after the project was launched, Margaret Hodge MP, chair of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC), described the FiReControl project as a complete failure. The PAC heard that the department in charge of the project had failed to secure the cooperation of the locally accountable and independent Fire and Rescue Services and had attempted to rush the project without a proper understanding of the costs or risks. When the project was finally cancelled, Matt Wrack, general secretary of the FBU, said: 'We have been sounding the alarm about this project for seven years, often as a lone voice, and this decision shows that we were right.'

those leading change need to make a realistic assessment of the opportunities and constraints in a situation and be sensitive to the needs and priorities of those who have a stake in the change, this may not happen. Those leading the change can become so committed to a project that they only pay attention to information that supports their own position. Edwards (2001) suggests that leaders have a tendency to classify decisions into categories by comparing immediate decisions with similar past decision scenarios. This encourages them to evaluate outcomes by focusing attention on only those attributes of the immediate situation that are consistent with the selected scenario category. Important but inconsistent information is ignored as they develop a mindset that restricts their attention to (only) those aspects of a situation they perceive to be relevant. Their failure to pay attention to inconsistent or negative feedback creates an illusion that they are acting effectively. This cognitive bias may be reinforced if change managers have a history of past successes, because a successful track record can promote a sense of self-belief and the perception that they are able to exercise sufficient control to achieve desired outcomes (see Chapter 4 for more on the 'trap of success'). Where a change is led by a cohesive leadership team, this self-reinforcing mechanism can be further strengthened if members suppress dissent and impede reality testing by engaging in what Janis (1972) describes as 'groupthink'. Example 1.5 provides an example of cognitive biases at work.

Example 1.5 Unrealistic goals for change at Direct Banking

A successful Dutch-based telephone and internet bank (referred to here as Direct Banking) serves customers across much of Europe. Over the past 14 years, it has developed an organizational culture that values the customer and focuses everybody's attention on delivering exceptional customer service. Staff working in the service centres are not restricted to narrow 'scripts' when talking to customers and are encouraged to develop relationships with them in order to identify and satisfy their needs. Over 85 per cent of Direct Banking's customers have recommended the bank to their friends and family, and the quality of its communication with customers has been a major factor contributing to its success.

Following a 10-year period of rapid growth, costs began to increase and margins were squeezed. A new CEO was appointed to tackle the problem. Soon after taking up his post, he brought in two new managers to replace two existing members of the bank's executive team. One of the displaced managers took early retirement and the other moved into a new role within the bank.

After being in post for just four weeks, the CEO informed the executive team that he wanted to introduce voice automation and routing (VAR). His vision was to drive down costs by using speech recognition-based technology to analyse in-bound calls in order to identify callers, why they are calling and what kind of transaction they required. In those cases where full automation of the transaction was not possible, he

argued that partial automation could provide an intermediate solution by collecting routine data (such as account numbers and the service required) and routing the call to a specialized agent who could complete the transaction.

The new CEO was respected for his outstanding past record of using technical innovation to drive down costs and increase margins and, since joining the bank, he made good use of already established internal communication channels to convince others that radical change was required to restore the bank's profitability. However, some senior managers, who had been involved for over a decade in developing the bank's outstanding reputation for customer service, informed the CEO they were worried that the proposed automation would damage the brand and do little to rescue the situation. They were particularly concerned because the new CEO had no previous experience of running a service-oriented brand. The new CEO listened but was not diverted from his chosen way forward. With the aid of his two new appointees, he managed the internal politics with considerable skill and convinced some of the doubters by suggesting ways in which the new technology could be adapted to increase its appeal to customers.

A project team was established and set to work. At an early stage, the team informed the CEO that the third-party vendor who was to provide the VAR technology felt that the plans to modify the system to address possible

customer concerns were too ambitious. This feedback did little to modify the CEO's view and he persisted with his plan to implement VAR. It was not until relatively late in the change process that the CEO's assumptions about customer acceptance were tested. The results from focus

groups with customers were so negative that it was obvious that implementing VAR would do serious damage to the brand. It was this belated feedback that eventually forced the CEO to revise his position and abandon the project.

Path dependence

An important feature of many self-reinforcing sequences is that early steps in a particular direction can produce further movement in the same direction and, over time, this process can constrain change leaders' freedom to construct and manage an effective change trajectory. Sydow et al. (2009) refer to this constraining process as 'organizational path dependence'. Path dependence begins with a critical event that triggers a pattern of self-reinforcing practices, which eventually squeeze out alternatives and limit a change manager's scope for action. Sydow et al. (2009) conceptualize path dependence as a three-phase process: preformation, path formation, and lock-in (Figure 1.2).

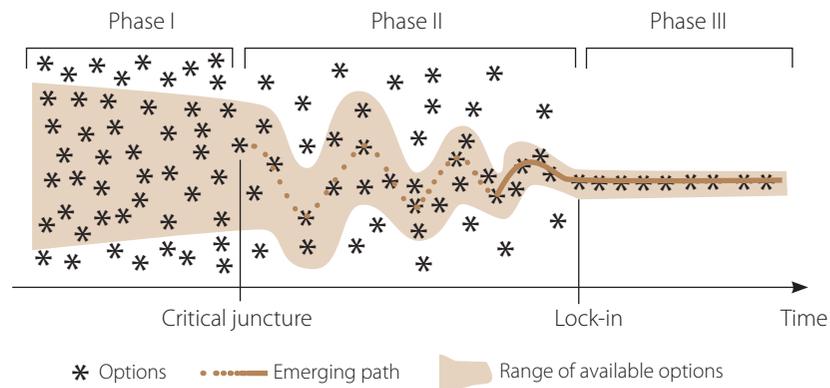


Figure 1.2 The constitution of an organizational path

Source: Republished with permission of the Academy of Management, from *Academy of Management Review*, 'Organizational path dependence: opening the black box', Jörg Sydow, Georg Schreyögg and Jochen Koch, 34(4), 2009, page 694; permission conveyed through Copyright Clearance Centre, Inc.

- 1 In the *preformation phase*, there are few constraints on change managers' freedom to act other than the organizations' established routines and practices. However, during this phase, one or more decisions or actions trigger a self-reinforcing sequence. This point is a critical juncture that marks the start of the second phase. Collier and Collier (1991) suggest that critical junctures can involve relatively brief periods, in which one particular direction emerges as the way forward, or they can involve an extended period of reorientation.
- 2 In the *path formation phase*, self-reinforcing sequences lead to the development of a pattern of events, decisions and actions that begins to dominate and divert change managers' attention away from alternative ways forward. While there is still a range of available options, this range narrows and it becomes progressively difficult to change course.
- 3 The *lock-in phase* is characterized by a further narrowing of options and the process becomes locked into a particular path. Schreyögg and Sydow (2011, p. 325) describe the most precarious feature of this stage as the risk of becoming dysfunctional as leaders lose the capability to adapt to new circumstances or better alternatives.

They become locked in to a particular way of functioning. When faced by more efficient alternatives or critical changes in the environment, established processes and practices persist and the system fails to adjust.

Minimizing the impact of reactive and self-reinforcing sequences

Sometimes, those leading a change are less effective than they might be because they fail to recognize some of the dynamics that affect outcomes, and so they do not always act in ways that will enable them to exercise as much control as they could over what happens.

Reactive sequences

When change involves different parties that are each seeking to pursue their own interests, then, depending on the balance of power, reactive sequences are likely to emerge. Often, reactions that are negative (from the point of view of the change agent's intentions) can be quickly detected but this is not always the case, especially when those who are unhappy with the emerging direction of change lack the confidence to voice their concerns, or have insufficient power to challenge events as they unfold. In the short term, those affected by the change may comply with leaders' directions but, at a later juncture, they may develop the confidence or acquire the power to challenge the way the change is being managed.

Change agents can improve their effectiveness by scanning their environment for threats and anticipating resistance, or responding quickly when others fail to support their actions. Mangham (1978), drawing on earlier work by Goffman (1959), discusses how leaders, like actors, can assess their 'audience' prior to a performance. He refers to Goffman's observation that some actors use mirrors so that they can practise and become an object to themselves backstage, before going 'onstage' and becoming an object to others. In a similar way, change managers can anticipate how those affected by a change might react to events. Mangham even suggests that leaders can simulate several stages into a number of alternative futures, a form of mental chess in which various moves and their consequences can be tested. A stakeholder analysis, which draws attention to those who will be affected by or can affect the outcome of a change, assesses how much power they have to determine the course of events, and anticipates their attitude towards an event, can facilitate this testing (see Chapter 10).

Self-reinforcing sequences

A danger with self-reinforcing sequences, whether they are driven by increasing returns, a psychological commitment to past decisions or cognitive biases, is that they can undermine change managers' flexibility and their ability to adapt to changing circumstances (see the discussion of deep structures in Chapter 3). Schreyögg and Sydow (2011, p. 322) refer to self-reinforcing sequences as entrapping processes that 'often unfold behind the backs of actors and bring about an escalating situation with unexpected results'. Sydow et al. (2009) argue that a minimum condition for breaking out of the path dependency that is often associated with self-reinforcing sequences is the restoration of choice. Change managers need to do whatever they can to maintain an awareness of and the freedom to adopt alternative courses of action.

Complex patterns

Sometimes, change unfolds as a pattern of punctuated equilibrium (see Chapter 3), which involves an alternation between self-reinforcing sequences, during which increasing returns and other forces promote the development of routines that narrow the scope for action, and reactive sequences where negative reactions and a hostile

context can trigger discontinuities that push the change in a new direction. These self-reinforcing reactive cycles can be observed over different time periods, such as a few days, months or even years, and in relation to different processes, such as the development of interpersonal relations within a project team, the design of new products and services, and the formulation and implementation of a new business strategy.

Chapter 2 considers what leaders can do to improve the practice of change management and argues that change managers can learn to be more effective if they step back and monitor what is going on – paying particular attention to how others react to what they do and how their decisions impact on immediate and longer term outcomes – and use these observations to guide their behaviour.

Summary

A review of the four process theories of change – teleological, dialectical, life cycle and evolutionary – revealed that they all view change as involving a number of events, decisions and actions that are connected in some sort of sequence, but they differ in terms of the degree to which they present change as following certain essential stages and the extent to which the direction of change is constructed or predetermined:

- *The ordering of stages:* Some theories place more emphasis on the order of the stages than others. For example, life cycle theories assume that change is a process that progresses through a necessary sequence of stages that are cumulative, in the sense that each stage contributes a piece to the final outcome, and related – each stage is a necessary precursor for the next. Teleological theories, on the other hand, are less prescriptive about the ordering of stages.
- *Predetermined versus constructed trajectories:* Life cycle and evolutionary theories present change as a predetermined process that unfolds over time in a prespecified direction. This kind of change involves incrementally adapting organizational forms in predictable ways. Teleological and dialectical theories, on the other hand, view change trajectories as constructed, in the sense that goals, and the steps taken to achieve goals, can be changed at the will of (at least some of) those involved in the process. According to this perspective, the process is not unduly constrained by an inherent code or factors external to the immediate system.
- *The impact of sequence on outcome:* Although teleological and dialectical theories suggest that members of a system have considerable freedom to construct change trajectories and assert that it is possible for them to break away from established routines and intentionally move the system towards redefined goals, this may not always be easy to achieve in practice. The nature of the change sequence, whether reactive or self-reinforcing, will affect the extent to which those leading the change will be able to realize this possibility.
- *Reactive sequences:* In reactive sequences, subsequent events challenge rather than reinforce earlier events. Negative reactions may produce only minor deviations from the intended path or they may be so strong that they may delay, transform or block the change.
- *Self-reinforcing sequences:* Self-reinforcing sequences involve positive feedback that reinforces earlier events and supports the direction of change. Three drivers of self-reinforcing sequences are increasing returns, a psychological commitment to past decisions, and cognitive biases. An important feature of self-reinforcing sequences is that early steps in a particular direction can produce further movement in the same direction and, over time, can constrain leaders' freedom to construct and manage an effective change trajectory.

It was argued that in order to minimize any negative impact from reactive and self-reinforcing sequences, those leading change need to be able to step back and observe what is going on, including their own and others' behaviour, identify critical junctures and subsequent patterns – some of which may be difficult to discern – and explore alternative ways of acting that might deliver superior outcomes.

Before reading Chapter 2, you might find it useful to think about managing change from the perspective of timing and the sequencing of actions. Exercise 1.1 explores some of the issues and choices that have to be considered when thinking about how best to introduce a change into an organization.

✓ **Exercise 1.1 *Managing a branch closure programme: an exercise in planning and managing the process of change***

The aim of this activity is to explore the issues and choices involved in developing an overall strategy for large-scale change.

The scenario

A long-established bank is facing strong competition from new entrants into the retail banking market. The new entrants have acquired some high-street branches but specialize in the provision of mobile and internet banking services. Consequently, they have a lower cost base because they do not carry the overheads associated with a large branch network. The bank is also facing an additional threat. An increasing number of customers are using smartphones to transfer funds and pay bills and are visiting their local branch less frequently.

The operations board of the traditional bank is busy working on a number of important projects and does not seem to have recognized the potential impact of the new competition and of mobile banking on their market share and margins.

You are a member of the operations board and you have given a lot of thought to the problem. You believe that the only viable strategy is to reduce the size of the existing branch network in order to reduce overheads, but to do so in a way that will lead to an increase in net revenue per customer. At this stage, you have not thought through all the details of the strategy. For example, should the branches targeted for closure be city-centre branches occupying expensive properties, but providing services for high net worth customers who the bank would be reluctant to lose, or small rural branches occupying less expensive premises but with fewer customers of high net worth to the bank?

Step 1

You have brainstormed a list of possible actions that could provide the basis for a way forward. These are listed below in Table 1.1.

You are invited to review and revise this list of actions and use your experience to:

- Delete any items that, on reflection, you feel are unimportant or irrelevant.
- Add, in the space provided at the bottom of Table 1.1, any other actions that you feel should be included. You are allowed to add up to four additional actions.
- Think about how the actions might be sequenced from start to finish. For each action, identify whether you think it should occur early or late in the change management process. You can record this view in the space provided on the right-hand side of the table. An interactive version of this table can be found at www.macmillanihe.com/Hayes-tpcm-5e. This might make it easier for you to experiment with different ways of sequencing the actions.

Table 1.1 Possible actions that will inform the strategy taken by the bank

		Early				Late			
1	Identify key stakeholders who might be affected by the change								
2	Provide a counselling service and retraining for those who are to be displaced								
3	Inform staff how they, personally, will be affected by the closure plan								
5	Identify a project leader and set up a branch closure team								
6	Announce the scope and scale of the closure plan to all staff								
7	Brief key managers about the problem and win their support for the closure plan								
8	Identify which branches are to be closed								
9	Review the success (or otherwise) of the closure programme and disseminate throughout the organization any lessons learned about change management								
10	Identify the information that will be required in order to decide the number and location of branches to be closed in order to achieve targeted benefits								
11	Announce closure plan to existing customers								
12	Train members of the branch closure team in change management skills								
13	Identify (and quantify) benefits sought from closures								
14	Develop a personnel package for displaced staff								
15	Assess effects of the closures on other aspects of the bank's functioning								
16	Plan any training that may be required for staff who are to be reassigned to other work								
17	Hold team meetings to brief staff about the closure plans and indicate when they will be informed about how they (personally) will be affected by the change								
18	Identify what steps could be taken to retain high value customers affected by the closures								
19	Provide training for managers and supervisors to help others and themselves to cope with the change								
20	Issue newsletter outlining progress towards full implementation								
21	Decide who should be involved in analysing the information relating to whether a closure plan will deliver sufficient benefits to justify the costs involved								
22	Seek views of customers who might be affected by the closures about what issues should be given attention								
23	Seek views of branch staff about the issues that will have to be given attention if the closure plan is to be successfully accomplished								
24	Post-implementation, provide feedback to staff about how the change is affecting performance								
25	Initiate programme to make properties suitable for disposal (e.g. remove vaults)								
26	Celebrate successes and build on them in order to motivate people to continue working to improve the bank's competitive position								
27	Decide on date for first closures								
28	Identify any personal gains or losses that might be perceived by those employees who will be affected by the closures								
29	Specify timetable for implementing the closure plan								
30	Consider what might be done to motivate employees to accept the change								
31	Issue a press release about the closure plan								
32	Monitor progress against timetable and anticipated benefits								
33	Explore the best way of disposing of redundant properties								
34	Identify social banking issues raised by the closures (e.g. what will happen to customers without transport when their local branch closes)								
35	Plan what will happen to displaced staff (redeployment, early retirement, redundancy)								
36	Arrange an awayday for members of the ops board to focus their thinking on emerging threats and opportunities and win their support for the change								

38	Reflect on how well the change is progressing and discuss with colleagues what else could be done to ensure the change is successful					
39	Decide who should be involved in identifying which branches are to be closed					

Step 2

Consider your list of action statements and assemble them into a plan:

- Identify the sequence of actions from start to finish, recognizing that some actions may occur in parallel or be repeated.
- Identify relationships between actions in your plan and consider how different actions might be grouped together to form separate steps or distinctive parts of your plan.
- Summarize your plan as a flow diagram.

You might find it useful to compare the change model you developed here to manage the branch closures with the model presented at the end of Chapter 2. As you read the remaining chapters of this book, you might also find it helpful to reflect on how the content of each chapter might influence your approach to managing this kind of change.

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AUTHOR INDEX

- 9/11 Commission 166, (182)
- Abernathy, F.A. 404, (407)
- Abramson, L.Y. 106, (115)
- Adair, J. 174, (182)
- Adams, J. 270, (278)
- Adams, J.S. 454, (456)
- Agle, B.R. (214)
- Aguinis, H. 207, 211, (213), 220, (222), 368, (372)
- Ahmed, M. (98)
- Alban, B. 334, (340)
- Alfes, K. (384)
- Allen, J. 227, 235, (242), 453, (456)
- Allinson, C.W. 66, (84)
- Ancona, D.M. 165, 166, 172, (182)
- Anderson, M.H. 175, (182)
- Andrews, A. 379, (384)
- Anthony, W.P. (183)
- Antonakis, J. 175, (182)
- Argyris, C. 33, (38), 245, (263), 492, 493–4, (499), 502, (513)
- Armenakis, A.A. 89, (97), (184), (264)
- Arthur, C. 10, (18), 171, (182)
- Arthur, J.B. 379, (383)
- Arthur, W.B. 9, (18)
- Ashford, S.J. 409, (418)
- Ashforth, B.E. 409, (419)
- Athos, A. 133, (140)
- Avolio, B.J. 174, 176, (182)
- Axelrod, J.B. (340)
- Axelrod, R.H. 329, (340)
- Bachkirova, T. 322, (340)
- Bailey, C. 375, (384)
- Bailey, T. 374, 375, 377, 380, (384)
- Bales, R.F. 145, (156)
- Balogun, J. 298, (303)
- Bamforth, K.W. 321–2, (340)
- Bandura, A. 323, 324, 325, (340)
- Banker, R.D. 365, (372)
- Barber, K. (184)
- Bargal, D. 289, (303)
- Barnett, M.L. (200)
- Barnett, W.P. 5, (18)
- Barrett, S.R.H. 205, (213)
- Barrington, H. 367, (373)
- Barros, I. 359
- Barry, V.E. 208, (214)
- Bartels, J. 409, (419)
- Bass, B.M. 175, (182)
- Bassham, J.E. (407)
- Bate, P. (488)
- Bateman, N. 472–3, 475–7, (479)
- Bazerman, M. 191, (200)
- Beak, J. (278)
- Beckhard, R. 23–4, 32, (38), 306, 307, 311, (318), 330, (340), 475, (479), 512, (513)
- Beer, M. 4, (18), 227, (242), 279, 290, 291, 293–6, 299, (303), 375, 483, (488)
- Begley, T.M. 245, (263)
- Beiker, S. 53, (64)
- Bekmeier-Feuerhahn, S. 270, (278)
- Belbin, R.M. 108, (115)
- Bell, C.H. 289, 290, (303), 331, (340)
- Ben-Tovim, D.I. 404–5, (407)
- Bengtsson, U. (364)
- Bennis, W. 163, (182)
- Berger, P.L. 495, (499)
- Berman, S.L. (200), 204, 205, (213)
- Bernstein, E.S. 507–8, (513)
- Berry, J.W. 411, (419)
- Bessant, J. 506, (513)
- Bhave, M.P. 24, (38), 66, (84), 459, 460, (468)
- BHS inquiry 209, (213)
- Biggs, J. 492, (499)
- Birkinshaw, J. 236, (242)
- Birt, J. 61, (64)
- Blake, R.R. 105, 107, 109, 110, (115), 174, (182), 343, (350), 432, (440)
- Blanchard, K. 174, (183)
- Boen, F. (419)
- Boje, D. 289, (303)
- Bolch, D. (407)
- Bolden, R. 163, 176, (182)
- Bordia, P. (242), (456)
- Bowen, H.R. 202, (213)
- Bowers, D.G. 331, (340)
- Boyle, T.A. (407)
- Bradbury, H. 343, (350)
- Bradley, C. 53–4, (64), 70, (84)
- Brailsford, S. (407)
- Bridges, W. 24, (38), 253, (263), 265, 269, 271, (278)
- Briner, R. (264)
- Brockner, J. 197, (200)
- Brown, A. 476, (479)
- Brown, A.D. (183)
- Brown, J.F. (407)
- Brown, L.D. 328, 336, (340)
- Brown, S.L. 45, 52, 58, (64), 228, (242), 507, (513)
- Bruch, H. 168, (182), (318)
- Brydon-Miller, M. 341, (350)
- Bryman, A. 174, (183)
- Buchanan, D.A. 30, 32, 33, (38), 469–70, 471, 472, 474, 476, 477, (479), 482, 483, (488), 503, (513)
- Bucy, M. 53, 60, (64)
- Bunker, B.B. 334, (340)
- Burgelman, R.A. 45, (64)
- Burke, R.J. 266, (278)
- Burke, W.W. 30, (38), 46, (64), 135–7, (140), 431, (440)
- Burnes, B. 21, 22, 28–9, (38), 60, (64), 87, (98), 207, (213), 248, (263), 289, 290, 298, 299, (303), 437, (440)
- Burt, H.E. (183)
- Bushe, G.R. 355, 356, 357, 360, (363)
- By, R.T. 89, (98), 164, (183), 186, (200)
- Cable, D. 236, (242)
- Cabrera, J.C. 409, (419)
- Cameron, E. 173, (183)
- Campbell, P. 423, (429)
- Cappelli, P. 369, (372)
- Carnegie, D. 102, (115)
- Caron, J.R. 391–2, (393)
- Carrol, A.B. 204, (213)
- Carroll, A.B. 191, (200)
- Carroll, G.R. 5, (18)
- Carter, M. (183)
- Cartwright, D. 326–8, (340)
- Cartwright, S. 408, 409, 410, 414–15, 417, (419)
- Cashman, T. (242), (456)
- Caudron, J. 69, (84)
- Chakravarthy, B. 45, (64)
- Champy, J. 385, 386, 387, 388, 390, (393)
- Chang, I. 354, (363)
- Chattopadhyay, P. 78, (84)
- Chell, E. (84)
- Child, J. 87, (98)
- Chisholm, R.F. 343, (350)
- Chittipeddi, K. 168, (183)
- Choi, M. 244, 247–8, (263)
- Clampitt, P.G. 226, 238–9, (242), 450, 452, (456)
- Clarkson, M.B. 189, 191, (200)
- Clegg, C.W. 26, 31, (38), 92, 93, (98), 308, (318)
- Clutterbuck, D. (340)
- Coch, L. 248, 252, (263), 341, (350)
- Coghlan, D. 289, (303)
- Cohen, C. (84)
- Cohen, W.M. 78, 509, (513)
- Collier, D. 13, (18)
- Collier, R.B. 13, (18)
- Collins, J. 87, (98)
- Collinson, D. 176, (183)
- Colquitt, J.A. 237, (242)
- Colville, I. 166, (183)
- Conger, J.A. 11–12, (18), 168, 170, 175, (183), 207, (214), (223)
- Conlon, D.E. (242)
- Connell, C. (407)
- Constantinescu, S. 10, (18), 90, (98), 171, (183)
- Conway, N. (264)
- Cooke, B. 289, 290, (303)
- Cooper, C.L. 408, 409, 414–15, 417, (419)
- Cooperrider, D. 351, 352, 353–4, 358, 359, (363), (364)

- Covey, S.R. 35, (38)
 Cox, E. (340)
 Crilly, D. 207, (214)
 Crosby, P.B. 437, (440)
 Culbertson, S.S. 463, (468)
 Cummings, T.G. 95, (98), 144, (156), 319, 331, 335–6, (340), 391, (393), 431, 437, (440)
 Cunliffe, A.L. 495, (499)
 Cunningham, I. 493, (499)
 Czajka, J.M. 245, (263)
- Daft, R.L. 502, (513)
 Dale, B. 471, (480)
 Dannemiller, K.D. 333, 334, (340)
 Darling, M.J. 504, (514)
 Daub, M. 53, (64)
 Davenport, T.H. 386–7, (393)
 David, A. 9, 472–3, (479)
 David, P. (18)
 Davidsson, P. 66, (84)
 Dawson, A. 21, 69, 70, (84)
 Dawson, P. (38)
 De Geus, A. 491, (499)
 De Jong, M. 54, (64), (419)
 De Massis, A. 423, (429)
 De Witte, H. (419)
 Deflorin, P. (407)
 DeKoch, R.J. (242), (456)
 Denis, J.-L. 176, 177–80, (183)
 DeNisi, A.S. 451–2, (456)
 Devanna, M.A. 163, (184)
 Dewey, J. 492, 493, (499)
 Dibella, A.J. 305, (318)
 Dick, B. 358, (363)
 Dickens, L. 341, (350)
 Dickman, M. (264)
 Dixon, N. 351, (363), 506, 508, 509, (513)
 Doh, J.P. 207, (214), 217, (222)
 Doherty, N. 197, (200), 247, (263)
 Donaldson, T. 218, (222)
 Douwes, R. (419)
 Drucker, P.F. 48, (64), 430
 Duchek, S. 231–2, (242)
 Duncan, R. 249, 250, 251, (264)
 Dunlop, J.T. 379, (384), (407)
 Dunphy, D. 52, (64), 299, (303)
- Ebbesen, E. 78, (84)
 Eden, D. 354, (363)
 Edwards, J.C. 12, (18)
 Egan, G. 23, (38), 73, (84), 105, 106–7, 110, 113, (115), 326, (340), 505, (513)
 Eisenberger, R. 454, (456)
 Eisenhardt, K.M. 45, 52, 58, (64), 228, (242), 507, (513)
 Eisenstat, R. (18)
 Eldon, M. 343, (350)
 Elliot, C. 352–3, 354, 356, 357, 358–9, (363)
 Ellis, A. (115)
 Elsass, P.M. 410–11, (419)
 Emerson, M. 186, (200)
 Epstein, L.D. 430–1, (440)
- Eriksson, M. 296–7, (303)
 Espedal, B. (98), (243), (264), (513)
 Ettorre, B. 430, (440)
- Ferlie, E. (65), 189, (200), 387, 388, 392, (393), 505, (514)
 Ferris, G.R. 178, (183)
 Fiedler, F. 174, (183)
 Field, J.M. (372)
 Fine, D. 475, (480)
 Finegold, M.A. 358, 359, (364)
 Fink, S.L. 269–70, (278)
 Fiol, C.M. 503, (513)
 Fischer, M. 505–6, (514)
 Fitzgerald, L. (38), 469–70, 471, 472, 474, (479), 483, (488)
 Flamholtz, E. 5, (18)
 Fleishman, E.A. 174, (183)
 Fletcher, L. (384)
 Fombrun, C.J. (200), 204, (214)
 Ford, J. (183), (200)
 Ford, J.D. 195, (200), 247, (264), 295, (303)
 Ford, L.W. 195, (200), 247, (264), 295, (303)
 Ford, M.W. 21, 22–3, (38)
 Fordyce, J.K. 145, (156)
 Foster, R.N. 53, (64)
 Franklin, J.L. 331, (340)
 Frattini, F. (429)
 Freeman, R.E. 189, (200)
 French, J.R. 252, (263), 341, (350)
 French, W.L. 289, 290, (303), 331, (340)
 Friedlander, F. 328, 336, (340)
 Friedman, M. 210, (214)
 Fritz, R. 334, (340)
- Galvin, B.M. 202–3, (214)
 Gardberg, N.A. (200), 204, (214)
 Gaspar, J.P. 211–12, (214)
 Gee, T. 10, (18), 171, (183)
 Gelade, G. 463, (468)
 Gerber, P. (182), (318)
 Gersick, C.J.G. 46–7, 48, 49, 55, 59, 60, (65), 503, (513)
 Ghobadian, A. 202, (214)
 Gibb, A. 138, (140)
 Gibson, J.W. 430, (440)
 Gilbertson, D. 212, (214)
 Gilley, A. 165, 175, (183)
 Gilley, J.W. (183)
 Gilmore, D.C. (183)
 Gioia, D.A. 168, (183)
 Glavas, A. 207, 211, (213), 220, (222)
 Glick, W.-H. (84)
 Goffee, R. 414, (419)
 Goffman, E. 14, (18)
 Gold, J. 177, (184), 496, (499)
 Gold, M. (303)
 Goldstein, I.L. 366, (372)
 Golembiewski, R.T. 354, (364)
 Gollop, R. (479)
 Gollwitzer, P.M. 325, (340)
 Gomez, C. 217–18, (223)
 Gould, S.J. 46, (65)
 Gouldner, A. 211, (214)
- Gratton, L. (384)
 Green, M. 173, (183)
 Greenberg, J. 237–8, (242), 454, (456)
 Greenhalgh, T. 482, 485, (488)
 Greenwood, D.J. 348–9, (350)
 Greenwood, R. 7, (18), 47–8, 49, (65), 86, (98)
 Greer, B.M. 21, 22–3, (38)
 Greiner, L.E. 70–1, 72, (84), 99, (115), 510, (513)
 Griffiths, A. (98)
 Grundy, T. 192, 194, 195, (200)
 Guerrero, F. 294, (303)
 Guest, D. 245, (264), 454, (456)
- Hackman, J.R. 121, (140), (156), 172, 174, (183), (440)
 Hailey, V.H. 298, (303)
 Hall, D.P. 178, (183)
 Hall, S. (64)
 Hammer, M. 385, 386, 387, 388, 390, (393)
 Hammond, J.H. (407)
 Handy, C.B. 414, (419)
 Hansen, M.A. (480)
 Hansson, F. (64)
 Hargie, O. 228, 240, (242)
 Harkavy, I. (350)
 Harris, E.F. (183)
 Harris, R.T. 23–4, 32, (38), 306, 307, 311, (318), 475, (479)
 Harris, S.G. (97)
 Harrison, R. 414, 415, 417, (419), 432, 433, (440)
 Harter, J.K. 463, (468)
 Hassard, J. (303)
 Hayes, J. (84), 111, (116), 187, (200), 270, 272–3, (278), 466–7, (468)
 Hayes, S.C. (19)
 Hayes, T.L. (468)
 Hayton, G. 369–70, (373)
 Healey, M.P. 49, (65), 503, (513)
 Healthcare Commission 201–2, (214)
 Helpap, S. 270, (278)
 Henderson, A.D. (98)
 Hendry, C. 22, (38), 342, (350)
 Hersey, P. 174, (183)
 Heskett, J.L. 173, (183), 463, (468)
 Hesselbein, F. 173, (183)
 Hickman, C.R. 72, (84)
 Higgs, M. 164–5, 172, (183)
 Hillenbrand, C. (214)
 Hinings, C.R. 7, (18), 47–8, 49, (65), 86, (98)
 Hiroto, D.S. 106, (116)
 Hirt, M. (84)
 Hodgkinson, G.P. 49, (65), 503, (513)
 Holland, B.M. (364)
 Hollenbeck, G.P. 178, (183)
 Holmes, T.H. 266–8, (278)
 Hook, L. 221, (223), 423, (429)
 Hope-Hailey, V. (384)
 Hopson, B. 113, (116), 270, (278)
 Hornstein, H.A. 123, (140)

- Horsted, J. 197, (200), 247, (263)
 House, R.J. (223)
 Hubbard, N. 411, (419), 448–9, 450, 451, 452, (456)
 Huber, G. 503, (513)
 Huber, G.P. (84)
 Hughes, M. 164, (183), (200)
 Hull, R. 218, (223)
 Huselid, M.A. 375, 379, (384)
 Husted, K. 507, 509, (513)
 Huy, Q.N. 35, (38), 168–9, (184)
 Hyde, P. 270, 272–3, (278), 466–7, (468)
- Irmer, B.E. (242), (456)
 Isaacs, M. 221, (223)
- Jackson, P. 298, (303)
 Jacobs, R.W. 333, 334, (340)
 Jacobson, L. 354, (364)
 Janis, I.L. 12, (19), 169, (183), 509–10, (513)
 Javenpaa, D.L. (393)
 Jawahar, M. 190, 192, (200)
 Jayaram, K. 334, (340)
 Jemison, D.B. 446, 447, 454, (456)
 Jick, T.D. (38)
 Jimmieson, N.L. (98), (242), (456)
 Johansen, S.T. (98), (243), (264), (513)
 Johnson, G. 60, (65)
 Johnson, R.H. 379, (384)
 Jones, D.T. 394, 396–9, 400, (407)
 Jones, G. 414, (419)
 Jones, R.A. 89, (98)
 Jones, T.M. (200), (213), 216, 217, (223)
 Jones, T.O. (468)
 Jørgensen, H.H. 4, (19)
- Kahneman, D. 191, (200)
 Kantor, R.M. 21, (38)
 Kanungo, R.N. 207, 211, (214), 217, (223)
 Kaplan, B.S. (364)
 Kaplan, R.S. 77, (84), 386, (393), 458, 462, 463, (468)
 Kaplan, S. 53, (64)
 Kaplinsky, R. (513)
 Ketley, D. (38), (479), (488)
 Kim, W.C. 67, (84), 420, 422, 423, 424, 425, (429)
 King, A.S. 354, (364)
 Kirkpatrick, D.L. 368–9, (372)
 Klein, K.J. 482, (488)
 Klein, K.L. 482, 484–7, (488)
 Klofsten, M. 138, (140)
 Kocakülâh, M.C. 400–1, (407)
 Koch, J. (19), (65), (85), (500)
 Kok, R. 120, (140)
 Kolb, D.A. 342, (350), 492–3, (499)
 Kotha, S. (200), (213)
 Kotlar, J. (429)
 Kotter, J.P. 21, 26, 32, (38), 130–3, (140), 163–4, 166, 167, 168, 171–2, 173, 175–6, (183), 226–7, (242), 248, 249, 253, 254, (264), 297, 298, (303), 473, 475, (480)
- Koys, D.J. 463, (468)
 Kraiger, K. 368, (372)
 Kühl, S. 172, (183)
- Lamming, R. (513)
 Lamont, S.S. 482, (488)
 Lamothe, L. (183)
 Langley, A. (183)
 Langley, G. 391, (393)
 Lank, A.G. 491, (499)
 Lank, E.A. 491, (499)
 Latham, G.P. 28, (38), 254, (264)
 Lawler, E.E. (156), 255, (264), (440)
 Leavitt, H.J. 227, (242)
 Leroy, F. 503, (513)
 Levine, E.E. (214)
 Levinthal, D. 509, (513)
 Lewin, K. 20–3, 32, (38), 49, 58, (65), 109, (116), 147, (156), 174, (184), 251, 269, 289, 290, (303), 326, 341, 344, (350), 424, (429), 471, 474, (480), 492–3
- Lewis, M. (303)
 Liker, J.K. 399–400, 402–3, (407)
 Lim, B. (19)
 Lines, R. 93–4, (98), 232, (243), 248, 252–3, (264), 509, (513)
 Lingham, T. (364)
 Lippert, R. (38)
 Lippitt, R. 23, (184), 333, (340)
 Litwin, G.H. 135–7, (140), 431, (440)
 Locke, E.A. 28, (38)
 Locock, L. 483, (488)
 Lopez, S. (384)
 Loveman, G.W. (468)
 Luckmann, T. 495, (499)
 Lyles, M.A. 503, (513)
- McAulay, L. (85), (98), (243)
 McClelland, D.C. 186, (200)
 McDonald, R.A. 216–17, (223)
 MacDonald, S. 232, 236, (243)
 MacDuffie, J.P. 375, 378, 379, (384)
 McGregor, D. 375, (384)
 McGuinness, T. (184)
 McKinsey 9, (19)
 Macklin, R. 370, (373)
 McLaughlin, G.L. 190, 192, (200)
 McLaughlin, K. 207, (214)
 McMillan, H.S. (183)
 McMillon, D. 207, (214)
 McNulty, T. (65), 186, 189, (200), 387, 388, 392, (393), 505, (514)
 Madden, A. (384)
 Mael, F. 409, (419)
 Maguire, P. (350)
 Mahoney, J. 8, (19)
 Maier, V. (182), (318)
 Malby, B. 505–6, (514)
 Malekzadeh, A.R. 411–13, (419)
 Maletz, M.C. 194, (200)
 Mangham, I.L. 14, (19), 234, (243)
 Mankita, I. (384)
 Margerison, C.J. 93, (98), 99, 107, (116)
- Marks, M.L. 266, (278), 446, 447, 454, (456)
 Marrow, A.J. 341, (350)
 Masters, B. 230, (243)
 Masuda, M. 267, (278)
 Mauborgne, R. 67, (84), 420, 422, 423, 424, 425, (429)
 May, R. 88, (98)
 Mellahi, K. 86–7, (98)
 Mendonca, M. 211, (214), 217, (223)
 Metzger, R.O. 99, (115)
 Michaiova, S. 507, 509, (513)
 Miles, M.B. 432, (440)
 Miles, R.E. 4–5, (19)
 Miles, R.H. 491, (499)
 Milgram, S. 215–16, 217, (223)
 Miller, C.C. (84)
 Milliken, F.J. (38), 228–31, (243), 295, (303), 495, (499)
 Mirvis, P.H. (200), 211, (214), 446, 447, (456)
 Mitchell, R.K. 206, (214)
 Money, K. (214)
 Moore, C. 503, (513)
 Morgan, D.E. 94, (98)
 Morgan, J.M. 399–400, 402–3, (407)
 Morgan, R. (184)
 Morris, S.A. 216–17, (223)
 Morrison, E.W. (38), 228–31, (243), 295, (303), 495, (499)
 Moskal, B.M. 229, (243)
 Mossholder, K.W. (97)
 Mouton, J.S. 105, 107, 109, 110, (115), 174, (182), 343, (350), 432, (440)
 Mueller, R.A.H. 227, (242)
 Mumford, A. 342–3, (350), (499)
 Murdock, L. 386, (393)
- Nadler, D.A. 32, 33, (38), (39), 52–3, 55–6, 59, (65), 73, (84), 128, (140), 148, (156), 186, (200), 251, 253, (264), (303), 307, 311, (318), 475, (480)
 Nahavandi, A. 411–13, (419)
 Nanus, B. 163, (182)
 Näslund, L. 166, (184)
 Nelson, G. 212, (214)
 Neus, A. (19)
 Neves, P. 170, (184)
 Newman, V. 308, (318)
 Newman, W. (65)
 NHS Modernisation Agency 32, (39), 471–2, 475, (480)
 Nicolaou, A. 50, (65)
 Noble, C. 370, (373)
 Nohria, N. 296, (303)
 Nolan, K. (393)
 Nonaka, I. 507, (514)
 Norman, C. (393)
 Northouse, P.G. 163, (184)
 Norton, D.P. 77, (84), 458, 462, 463, (468)
- Oakland, J. 315–17, (318)
 O'Brien, S.A. 221, (223)
 Oczkowski, E. 370, (373)

- Oestreich, D.K. 229, (243)
 Oettingen, G. 324–6, (340)
 Oldham, G.R. 121, (140)
 Oreg, S. 165, 167, 169, 170, 172, (184), 245, 249, (264)
 O'Reilly, C.A. 227, 232, 238, (243)
 Orlikowski, W.J. 45, 46, (65), (182), 228, (243)
 Osterman, P. 369, (373)
 O'Toole, C. 53–4, (64), 70, (84)
 O'Toole, J. 266, (278)
 Owen, L. (19)
 Oxtoby, B. 176, (184)
- Paine, L.S. 217, (223)
 Parkes, C.M. 265, 266, (278)
 Parry, C.S. 504, (514)
 Pascale, R.T. 111, (116), 133, (140), 176, (184)
 Patterson, M. 463, (468)
 Payne, R. 409, (419)
 Perner, F. 166, (184)
 Perrewe, P. (183)
 Peters, T. 87, (98)
 Petruzzelli, A.M. (429)
 Pettigrew, A.M. 51, (65), 87, (98), 186, (200)
 Pfeffer, J. 377, 378–9, 380, 381, (384)
 Piercy, N. 192, (200)
 Pierson, P. 8, 9, (19)
 Pitt, M. (243)
 Pitt, M.R. 73–4, 80, 81–2, (85), 90–1, (98)
 Polkinghorne, D.E. 496, (500)
 Pondy, L.R. 227, 232, 238, (243)
 Poole, M.S. 5, 7, (19)
 Porter, I. 255, (264)
 Porter, L.W. 150, (156), 439, (440)
 Postma, T. 120, (140)
 Premack, S.L. 451, (456)
 Provost, L. (393)
 Prueyn, A. (419)
 Pugh, D. 89, (98), 249, (264), 432, (440)
 Pye, A. (183)
- Quigley, N.R. 207, (214), 217, (222)
 Quinn, J.B. 311, (318)
 Quinn, R.E. 45–6, 48, 49, 52, 59, (65)
- Raelin, J. 343, (350)
 Rahe, R.H. 266–8, (278)
 Ramanantsoa, B. 503, (513)
 Raynor, M.R. 87, (98)
 Reason, P. 343, (350)
 Reddy, M. 112, (116)
 Reid, M. 367, (373)
 Retna, K.S. 94, (98)
 Revans, R.W. 342, (350), 506, (514)
 Reynolds, M. 501, (514)
 Rhoades, L. 454, (456)
 Richard, D. 460–1
 Ricketts, R. 379, (384)
 Robert, G. (488)
 Rogers, C.R. 107, (116)
 Rogers, E. 482, (488)
 Roggenhofer, S. (480)
- Rogovsky, N. 369, (372)
 Romanelli, E. 47, 49, 51–2, (65), 70, (84)
 Roos, D. (407)
 Rosenthal, R. 354, (364)
 Rotter, J.B. 88, (98), 323
 Rowland, D. 165, 172, (183)
 Ruona, W.E.A. 247–8, (263)
 Ryan, A.M. (384)
 Ryan, K.D. 229, (243)
- Safferstone, T. 95, (98)
 Sahdev, K. 197–8, (200), 247, (264)
 Samuelson, W. 49, (65)
 Scanlan, J. (84)
 Schein, E.H. 28, (39), 173, (184), (200), 205, (214), 294, (303), 414, (419), 485, (488), 502, 510–11, (514)
 Scherrer-Rathje, M. 401–2, (407)
 Schlesinger, L.A. 248, 249, 253, 254, (264), 297, 298, (303)
 Schmidke, K.A. 172, (184)
 Schmidt, F.L. (468)
 Schmit, M.J. (384)
 Schmuck, R.A. 432, (440)
 Schneider, B. 4, (19), 379, (384)
 Schneider, S.C. (214)
 Schnelle, T. (183)
 Scholes, K. (65)
 Schön, D.A. 33, (38), 491, 492, 493–4, (499), (500), 502, (513)
 Schreyögg, G. 13–14, (19), (65), (85), 492, (500)
 Schroeder, R.D. (372)
 Schweiger, D.M. 451–2, (456)
 Schweitzer, M.E. (214)
 Scott, M. 138, (140)
 Seijts, G.H. 254, (264)
 Selart, M. (98), (243), (264), (513)
 Seligman, M.E.P. 88–9, (98), 106, (115), (116), 323
 Senge, P.M. (182)
 Shabana, K.M. 204, (213)
 Shaiken, H. 377, (384)
 Shani, A.B. 354, (363)
 Shaw, B.R. 194, (200)
 Shaw, R.B. (65), 73, (84), (303)
 Shaw, W.H. 208, (214)
 Shepard, H.A. 342, (350)
 Siegel, D. 204, (214)
 Siggelkow, N. 130, (140)
 Silva, M.A. 72, (84)
 Silverman, R.E. 430, (440)
 Sims, D. (85), (98), (243)
 Sims, R.R. 217, (223)
 Sinha, K.K. (372)
 Sitkin, S.B. 446, 447, 454, (456)
 Smith, A. 369–70, (373)
 Smith, Adam 385, (393)
 Smith, M. 367, (373)
 Snow, C.C. 4–5, (19)
 Sohoni, V. 379, (384)
 Somerville, K.A. 173, (184)
 Sorensen, P.E. 358, (364)
 Sorra, J.S. 482, 484–7, (488)
- Spector, B. (18)
 Spencer, J. 217–18, (223)
 Spillane, J. 176, (184)
 Srivastva, S. 351, 352, (363), (364)
 Stace, D. 299, (303)
 Stahl, G.K. 212, (214), 215, 216, 218, 220, (223)
 Stavros, J. (363)
 Staw, B.M. 10, 11, (19), 430–1, (440)
 Steele, F.I. 105–6, (116)
 Stein, B.A. (38)
 Sterin, J. 111, (116), 176, (184)
 Stoddard, D.B. 386–7, (393)
 Storey, J. 30, (38)
 Strebel, P. 68, (85)
 Sully de Luque, M. 212, (214), 215, 216, 218, 220, (223)
 Sully de Luque, M.F. (223)
 Sun, K. 6, (19)
 Sun, P.Y.T. 175, (182)
 Sundgren, M. 296–7, (303)
 Suneson, A. (64)
 Sunstein, C.R. 49, (65), 88, (98), 251, (264)
 Swank, C.K. 403–4, (407)
 Sweeny, K. 324, (340)
 Swieringa, J. 501, 509, (514)
 Sydow, J. 13–14, (19), 47, (65), 73, (85), 492, 494, (500)
 Szulanski, G. 481, 483, (488), 507, 509, (514)
- Taddeo, K. (278)
 Tajfel, H. 409, (419)
 Taylor, F.W. 319–20, (340), 395
 Teesdale, J.D. (115)
 Tesone, D.V. 430, (440)
 Thaler, R.H. 49, (65), 88, (98), 251, (264)
 Thibaut, J. 237, (243)
 Thomas, W. (182)
 Thompson, D. 80–1, (85)
 Thomson, J.W. (407)
 Thorpe, R. 177, (184), (499)
 Tichy, N.M. 123, (140), 163, (184)
 Tillmann, F.J. (183)
 Tissington, P.A. (419)
 Tjosvold, D. 228, (243)
 Tornatzky, L.G. 482, (488)
 Tourish, D. 228, 240, (242)
 Trist, E.L. 320, 321–2, (340)
 Trosten-Bloom, A. 358, (364)
 Truss, C. 374, 375, (384)
 Turner, J.C. 409, (419)
 Tushman, M.L. 47, 49, 51–3, 56, 59, (65), 70, (84), 128, (140), 311, (318)
 Tversky, A. 191, (200)
- Uhi, M. (64)
 Ullrich, J. (419)
- Vakola, M. (184), (264)
 Van Buren, M.E. 95, (98)
 Van Dam, K. 247, (264)
 Van de Ven, A.H. 5, 6, 7, (19)
 Van Dick, R. 409, 410, (419)
 Van Dijk, M. 54, (64)

- Van Peteghem, D. 69, (84)
 Vaughan, A. 205, (214)
 Veiga, J.F. 410–11, (419)
 Venbeselaere, N. 410, (419)
 Viaey, I. (184)
 Vince, R. 501, (514)
 Von Bertalanffy, L. 320, (340)
 Vroom, V.H. 255, (264)
 Vuori, T.O. 168–9, (184)
- Waldman, D.A. 202–3, 204, (214), (223)
 Walker, L. 237, (243)
 Walsh, J.P. 509, (514)
 Walsh, P. 409, (419)
 Walsh, S. 31, (38), 308, (318)
 Walton, A.E. (65)
 Walton, R.E. 374, 375, (384), 481, 482, 485, (488)
 Walumbwa, F.O. (182)
 Wanous, J.P. 451, (456)
 Warr, R. (468)
 Washburn, N.T. (223)
 Waterman, R.H. 87, (98), 134, (140)
- Watkins, K. 341, (350)
 Watson, J. (38)
 Weber, T.J. (182)
 Weick, K.E. 45–6, 48, 49, 52, 59, (65), 502, 509, (513), (514)
 Weil, D. 379, (384), (407)
 Weil, R. 145, (156)
 Weisbord, M.R. 134–5, (140), 331, (340), 506
 Welbourne, T. 379, (384)
 Werkman, R. 169–70, (184)
 Werther, W.B. 90, (98)
 Wesley, B. (38)
 Wesson, M.J. (242)
 West, M.A. (468)
 Whelan-Berry, K.S. 173, (184)
 Whipp, R. 87, (98)
 White, R. (184)
 Whitney, D. 356, 358, (363), (364)
 Whittington, R. (65)
 Whyte, W.F. (350)
 Wicks, A.C. (200), (213)
 Wierdsma, A. 501, 509, (514)
- Wiesinger, A. 53, (64)
 Wilkinson, A. 86–7, (98)
 Wilson, D. 86, (98)
 Winter, S. 483, (488)
 Womack, J.P. 394, 396–9, 400, (407)
 Wong, J.C. 221, (223)
 Wood, D.J. (214)
 Worley, C.G. 95, (98), 144, (156), 319, 331, 335–6, (340), 391, (393), 431, 437, (440)
- Yaeger, T.F. (364)
 Yakola, D. (64)
 Yates, M. 165, 167, (184)
 Young, S. 463, (468)
 Young, T. 404, (407)
- Zajonc, R.B. 507, (514)
 Zaltman, G. 249, 250, 251, (264)
 Zeckhauser, R.J. 49, (65)
 Zeffane, R. 94, (98)
 Ziegler, C. 10, (19), 171, (184)
 Zimbardo, P.G. (214), (223)
 Zollo, M. (214)

SUBJECT INDEX

- 5S methodology 400–1
7S model 117, 130, 133–4, 142, 148
- Aboca 423
absenteeism 285–6
absorptive capacity 509
access over ownership business model 69
Accor 423
acculturation theory 408, 411–13
achievement cultures 415, 416, 417
acquisitions *see* mergers and acquisitions
action learning 342, 343, 506
action research 22, 281, 328, 341–9, 475, 506
action science 343
Active Sports Equipment Company 82–3, 132
adaptability 132–3
adaptation 55, 57, 59, 132–3
 continuous incremental 41, 45–6, 137
advising mode of intervening 42, 105–6
affirmative projection 353–4
after action reviews 504
agency
 sense of 106–7, 167, 323–4
 see also change agency
agenda for change 80–3
agreements 188, 254
Airbnb 69
Albarran, Tammy 221
Alibaba 69
alignment 4–5, 32, 49, 55, 57–8, 75, 76, 131–3, 159, 165, 171–2, 173, 298, 378–82
alignment check tool 78–80
altruism 207–8, 210–11
Analog Devices 461–2
analysis
 content 147
 critical path 313–14
 of diagnostic information 118, 146–8
 force-field 20–1, 22, 108–9, 142, 147–8, 153–5
 person 366
 qualitative 147–8
 quantitative 148
 stakeholder 192–5
 SWOT 150–3
 task 366
 training needs 366–7
anticipating change 53–4
apathetic egotism 209–10
Apple 50, 69
appreciative inquiry 281, 343, 351–63
appreciative interviewing 356, 360–2
approachability 94
Aquinas, Thomas 211
Asda 56, 287–9, 296, 484
assembly lines 395
assimilation 411–13, 414–15
assumptive worlds 265–6
AT&T 90
attendance practices 376
attitude surveys 331
attitudes, effect on behaviour 439
audits
 communication strategies 240
 culture 414
Australia 369–71, 404–5
autonomy, crisis of 71, 72
Avon 359
Awakishi diagrams 308–9
awaydays 337, 506
Axelrod meeting canoe 329
Bairrada Wines 305–6
balanced scorecard 77, 78, 462–4
bank note withdrawal 54
Bank of Scotland 190
banking 12–13, 16, 153, 167, 190, 218, 219, 230, 426
Barclaycard 197–8
Barings Bank 218
baselining 390
batch production systems 395, 399
BBC 61, 75
 change strategies 291–3
 staff survey 142, 143, 148, 149, 331
Beckhard's process for improving intergroup relations 330
behaviour
 cycle of competitive 68
 discretionary 376, 377
 effect on attitudes 439
 organizational citizenship 454
 responsible *see* ethical practice
benchmarking 75, 348, 390, 421, 466
Benn, Joe 71–2
best practice puzzle 481–2
BHS 209
bias 11–12, 144, 145, 146, 409
Birt, John 61, 75, 292
black money 54
blame cultures 507
blue ocean thinking 67, 420, 422–4
blueprint changes 29, 297, 309, 310, 457
blueprint planning 304
Bolland, Marc 50
Bomholt, Rene 301
bone density scans 506
boundary-spanning roles 231–2
BPR *see* business process re-engineering (BPR)
Brin, Sergey 510
British Airways 8
British Gas 56
BT Cellnet 410
Burke-Litwin causal model of organizational performance and change 108, 117, 130, 135–7, 142, 143, 148, 431
burning platform analogy 90, 171
business platform model 118, 130, 138
business process re-engineering (BPR) 282, 337, 385–93, 505
business start-ups 71–2
business thinking 505
car importer example 6
car ownership 423
career planning and development interventions 337
causal links 438
causal relationships 122
cell-based interventions 472
ceremonies 253
challenging mode of intervening 42, 106, 110–11, 113
chance factors 87
change
 agenda for 80–3
 anticipating 53–4
 discontinuous 46–7, 48, 49–50, 51, 52, 70–1, 72
 external sources of 66–70, 71–2
 incremental 41, 45–6, 52–3, 55–8, 59, 71
 intensity of 59–60
 internal sources of 70–2
 proactive 55–7, 59
 reactive 55–7, 59
 transactional 136, 137
 transformational 52–3, 55–7, 58, 59, 136, 137
 typology of 55–7, 59
change agency 42, 86–91
 deterministic view 86–7, 88
 voluntarist view 87–91
change agents 4, 99
 clarification of issues 96
 client identification 95–6
 as facilitators 342–3
 helping skills 113–14
 inferred motives 94–5
 learning from own experience 489, 491–9
 selection of 42, 92
 starting change process 92–6
 see also change relationships; intervention styles
change management indicator 466–7
change management skills 91
change plans 280, 304–18
 detailed 306–15, 449
 figure of eight framework 315–17
 high level 304–6

- implementation plans 309–11, 315, 449
- monitoring implementation of 458–61
- scheduling 313–14
- change process *see* process models of change
- change readiness 89, 91, 169–71, 248–50, 424–5
 - see also* motivation
- change relationships 24, 26, 42, 93–6, 99–115
 - advising approach 42, 105–6
 - challenging approach 42, 106, 110–11, 113
 - clarification of issues 96
 - client identification 95–6
 - collaborative 106–13, 188, 343
 - establishing 93
 - helping skills 113–14
 - information-gathering approach 42, 106, 111–12, 113
 - prescriptive approach 105–6, 112–13
 - quality of 93–5
 - supportive approach 42, 106, 107–8, 113
 - theorizing approach 42, 106, 108–10, 113
- change sequences 58–9
 - reactive 1, 7–8, 14–15, 491
 - self-reinforcing 1, 8–15, 47, 492
- change strategies 279–80, 287–302
 - case study 287–9, 296
 - combined 279, 293–6
 - contingency model 280, 298–301
 - economic strategies 279, 290–2, 293–6
 - historical overview of 289–90
 - incremental 297, 299–300
 - organization development strategies 279, 291–6
 - situational variables and 296–8
 - top teams and 294–6
 - transformational 300–1
- change tools
 - 5S methodology 400–1
 - 7S matrix 134
 - after action reviews 504
 - alignment check 78–80
 - appreciative interview schedules 362
 - Awakishi diagrams 308–9
 - Axelrod meeting canoe 329
 - Beckhard's process for improving intergroup relations 330
 - change management indicator 466–7
 - conference method 334–5, 506
 - critical path analysis 313–14
 - diagnosing external alignment 379–81
 - diagnosing internal alignment 382
 - five whys 401
 - force-field analysis 153–5
 - opening second channel to observe oneself 495–6
 - organization mirror 330–1, 344, 505, 506
 - plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle 391, 396
 - preferred future approach 334–5, 506
 - priority review 505–6
 - seven wastes 400
- stakeholder grid 108, 195
- survey feedback intervention 332–3
- SWOT analysis 150–3
- valued outcomes assessment 257–8
- WOOP methodology 325–6
- change trajectories
 - constructed 7
 - predetermined 7
- charismatic evolution 300
- charismatic leadership 174–5
- charismatic transformation 300
- Chicago 359
- Chrysler 56
- churn 32–3
- CIA 166
- Cigna 391–2
- claims settlement process 390–1
- client identification 95–6
- climate for implementation 484–5, 486–7
- co-option 254
- coaching 322–3, 376
- coal mining industry 56–7, 321–2
- coercion 254
- cognitive biases 11–12
- cognitive deficits 89
- cognitive dissonance 342
- cognitive frameworks 48–9, 249
- coherence 176–7
- collaboration, growth through 71, 72
- collaborative evolution 299
- collaborative modes of intervening
 - 106–13, 188, 343
- collaborative transformation 300
- collages 145
- collective leadership 175–80
- collective learning 489, 501–13
- commitment
 - to job 247
 - organizational 245–7
 - to past decisions 10–11
- commitment maximization strategies 374–83
- communications 33, 160–1, 224–42
 - auditing 240
 - case studies 160–1, 224–5, 241
 - channel 238
 - content 227, 235–8
 - directionality 227–31
 - feedback and accuracy of 227–8
 - framing 175
 - during implementation 449–52
 - lack of upward 228–31, 295–6
 - lateral 228
 - to minimize ambiguity 450–2
 - organizational silence 228–31, 295–6
 - perceptions of fairness and 237–8
 - rhetorical crafting 175
 - roles in 231–4
 - sense giving 159, 165, 168–71
 - strategies 226–7, 238–40, 450, 452
 - transparency 236
 - trust and 232–4
- competences 170–1, 256, 259–60
- competitive behaviour cycle 68
- complementary products 422
- completely free business model 69
- component models of organizational functioning 117, 128, 141
- conceptual models 91, 121
 - see also* diagnostic models; process models of change
- Concrete Flags Ltd 30–1, 304–5, 496–8
- conference method 333–5, 338, 506
- confidence 88–9, 93–4, 106, 170–1, 178, 323–4
- Connect2 224–5, 226
- consolidation 271–2, 276
- constraining factors 75–6
- constructed change trajectories 7
- containment 481–2
- content analysis 147
- contingency model 280, 298–301
- continuity 410
- continuous improvement 399
- continuous incremental adaptation 41, 45–6, 137
- control
 - crisis of 71, 72
 - locus of 88, 323
- control strategies 374–5
- cooperative inquiry 343
- coordination 9, 32, 298
 - growth through 71, 72
- copying, exact 483
- corporate social responsibility (CSR) 204, 207
 - see also* ethical practice
- correlation coefficients 148
- cost reduction strategies 374–5
- counselling 322, 323
- creative opportunism 178
- creativity, growth through 71, 72
- critical junctures 7, 13
- critical path analysis 313–14
- cross-functional processes 386
- cultural arrogance 454
- cultural profiling 282, 338, 408, 414–18
- cultural relativism 218
- culture audits 414
- customer-related measures 77, 462
- cycle-breaking endeavours 105
- cycle of competitive behaviour 68
- dairy company case 284
- Dana Corporation 253
- data analysis 118, 146–8
 - qualitative techniques 147–8
 - quantitative techniques 148
- data collection methods 118, 142–6
 - in action research 344
 - interviews 144
 - observations 145–6
 - projective methods 145
 - questionnaires 144–5
 - sampling 146
 - unobtrusive measures 146
- data interpretation 118, 148–55
- de Jong, Joep 358, 359

- death spiral 73
 deception 211–12
 decision making, delegated 377
 deculturation 411–13
 deep structures 41, 46, 47–8, 132
 delegated decision making 377
 delegation, growth through 71, 72
 Deming, W.E. 395
 denial 271, 274–5
 dependence 187–8
 depression 271, 275
 determinism 86–7, 88
 developmental action inquiry 343
 diagnosis 24, 25, 27–8, 118, 120, 141–56
 in action research 344
 of alignment of people management practices 379–82
 analysis 118, 146–8
 case study 120–2, 128, 142
 clarification of information requirements 118, 142, 143
 information gathering 118, 142–6, 344
 interpretation 118, 148–55
 model selection 118, 141–2
 political considerations 148–50
 see also diagnostic models
 diagnostic models 91, 117–18, 120–40, 148
 Burke-Litwin causal model of organizational performance and change 108, 117, 130, 135–7, 142, 143, 148, 431
 characteristics of good 118, 139
 component models 117, 128, 141
 holistic models 117–18, 128, 129–38, 141
 implicit models of organizational functioning 117, 118, 122–7, 139
 Klofsten's business platform model 118, 130, 138
 Kotter's integrative model of organizational dynamics 117, 129, 130–3
 McKinsey 7S model 117, 130, 133–4, 142, 148
 selection of 118, 141–2
 Weisbord's six-box model 117, 130, 134–5
 dialectical models of change 1, 5, 7
 dictatorial evolution 300
 dictatorial transformation 301
 Diess, Herert 56
 difference tests 148
 digital technologies
 disruptive impact of 50, 68–70
 microcomputer producers 51–2
 Direct Banking 12–13, 167
 direction, growth through 71, 72
 disconfirmation 342
 discontinuous change 46–7, 48, 49–50, 51, 52, 70–1, 72
 discretionary behaviours 376, 377
 distributed leadership 159, 175–80
 distributive justice 237
 division of labour 385
 double-loop learning 34–5, 52, 352, 493–4, 502–3
 Douglas refinery 261–2
 downsizing interventions 337
 Doyle Wilson Housebuilders 396
 drawings 145
 Dropbox 69
 due diligence 444–8
 Dunlop, Ruth 361
 Dyke, Greg 291, 292, 293
 eBay 69
 Echo Engineering 463
 Eco-Pure 444, 445, 446, 447, 448, 449, 453
 economic strategies 279, 290–2, 293–6
 economic trends 67
 ecosystem business model 69
 education 251
 effectiveness
 communication strategies 240
 indicators of 74–7
 timescales 131–3
 of training 368–9
 efficiency 68
 effort–performance expectancies 255, 259–60
 ego resilience 178
 egotism 208–10
 Einarsdóttir, Birna 167
 elderly care sector 285–6
 Elop, Stephen 9, 10, 90, 171
 emergency response 169–70
 emergent changes 45, 297, 309, 457
 emissions scandal 56, 203, 205–6, 217, 218, 219
 emotional appeal 423
 emotional intelligence 178
 emotional support 253–4
 empathy 212
 employee engagement 463
 employee voice 377
 employee wellness interventions 337
 employment security 377
 empowerment 106–7
 enabling 159, 165, 172–3
 enabling factors 75–6
 end state, clarity of 310–11
 engineering culture 511
 entrepreneurial venture creation model 24, 460
 entropy 129
 environmental coupling 178
 Environmental Defense Fund 207
 environmental determinism 424
 Environmental Protection Agency, USA 203
 environmental regulations 75–6
 equifinality 87, 129
 equilibrium periods 41, 46–7, 48–9, 52, 71, 72
 equity of treatment, perceptions of 197–8, 237–8, 247, 256, 260–1, 454
 equity theory 238, 454
 espoused theories 492
 ethical imperialism 218
 ethical practice 160, 201–13, 215–22
 altruistic and egotistic behaviour 207–11
 case studies 160, 201–2, 203, 205–6, 221
 consequences of irresponsible behaviour 218–20
 contextual factors 215–18
 individual differences 212
 intentions, actions and circumstances 211–12
 performance and 220
 promoting 220–1
 stakeholders and 203–6
 EU Competition Commission 209
 European Working Time Directive 236
 evolution, Darwin's theory of 46
 evolutionary growth 70–1, 72
 evolutionary models of change 1, 5, 7
 exact copying 483
 executive culture 511
 expectancy theory 255–61
 experiential learning 342, 489, 491–9
 extended stakeholder perspective 203–4
 Facebook 69
 facilitation 253–4, 273–6
 facilitators 342–3
 factory-level improvement model 472–3
 fair treatment, perceptions of 197–8, 237–8, 247, 256, 260–1, 454
 feedback 21, 22–3, 30, 31, 32, 34, 129, 136, 172, 247, 280, 315
 accuracy of communications and 227–8
 in action research 344
 change management indicator 466–7
 fear of negative 229–31, 331
 operational 24, 459, 460
 reflection and 493
 strategic 24, 459–60
 survey feedback interventions 331
 field theory *see* force-field analysis
 figure of eight framework 315–17
 financial measures 77, 462
Financial Times 50, 54
 FiReControl project 11
 First Direct 34, 426
 five whys tool 401
 Flinders Medical Centre 404–5
 flow 397–8
 Forbes 53
 force-field analysis 20–1, 22, 108–9, 142, 147–8, 153–5
 forced evolution 300
 forced transformation 300
 Ford, Henry 320, 395
 four actions framework 67, 420, 421–2
 fragility of collective leadership 177–80
 fragmentation of change process 31, 280, 308
 framing 175
 Freedman House 345–8
 freemium business model 69
 friendliness 94
 Fryer, Richard 323, 426–8
 functional conditioning 77–8
 functional misalignment 76

- gain frame 191–2
 Galaxy 241
 gatekeepers 232
 General Electric 506
 GNER 63
 goal setting 22–3, 254–5
 Good Samaritan parable 208–11
 Google 69, 507, 510
 Gorton, Steve 295
 gradualist paradigm 41, 45–6
 Grampian Police 405–6
 Green, Philip 209
 group-based interventions 326–31, 438
 group dynamics 22
 group interviews 144
 groupthink 12, 169, 509–10
Guardian 50

 Hammersmith Hospital NHS trust 361, 362, 365
 Hanson Trust 291
 Harley-Davidson 504
 Harwood Manufacturing Company 252, 341, 343, 348
 Hayes, John 358
 HBO 230
 healthcare 32, 61–2, 75, 176–7, 179–80, 189–90, 201–2, 221, 236, 283–4, 285, 353, 359–60, 361, 362, 365, 387–9, 401, 404–5, 474, 482, 483, 503, 505, 506, 515–16
 Healthcare Commission 201–2
 hedonistic egotism 209
 heijunka 399
 heliotropic hypothesis 352–4
 helping skills 113–14
 helplessness, learned 88–9, 106, 323
 high involvement organization redesign 338
 high level plans 304–6
 high performance management 282, 337, 374–83
 Hodge, Margaret 11
 holacracy 430
 Holder, Eric 221
 holistic models of organizational functioning 117–18, 128, 129–38, 141
 honesty 211–12
 Hopson, Barrie 461
 HP 45
 human process interventions 281, 335–6, 434
 action research 22, 281, 328, 341–9, 475, 506
 appreciative inquiry 281, 343, 351–63
 cultural profiling 282, 338, 408, 414–18
 human process issues 431
 human resource interventions 281, 335–6, 337, 435
 high performance management 282, 337, 374–83
 training and development 281, 337, 365–72, 376
 human resource issues 431
 human resource management (HRM), soft and hard models 374–5
 Hunt, Jeremy 202

 Iacocca, Lee 56
 Iceland 167
 illness susceptibility 267–8
 imagination 353, 357
 implementation 25, 30–2, 441, 443–56
 acquisitions 444–55
 in business process re-engineering 391
 communications during 449–52
 monitoring and reviewing 441–2, 457–68
 role of leadership 163–73
 spreadability of change and 482–8
 in value innovation 424–5
 see also change strategies
 implementation climate 484–5, 486–7
 implementation plans 309–11, 315, 449
 implicit models of organizational functioning 117, 118, 122–7, 139
 improvisation 45–6
 in-group bias 409
 incentives 377
 increasing returns 9–10
 increasing-sum game 188
 incremental change 41, 45–6, 52–3, 55–8, 59, 71
 incremental change strategies 297, 299–300
 India 54, 283–4
 induction practices 376
 inertia 47, 48–9, 51, 58, 132, 503
 influence *see* power and influence
 information gathering 118, 142–6
 in action research 344
 interviews 144
 observations 145–6
 projective methods 145
 questionnaires 144–5
 sampling 146
 unobtrusive measures 146
 information-gathering mode of intervening 42, 106, 111–12, 113
 information-sharing practices 376
 informational justice 237
 ingrained schemata 503
 innovation 68, 462
 innovation/values fit 485–7
 inquiry matrices 356
 instrumental approach 205
 insurance industry 403–4
 integration 411–13, 415
 Intel 483
 intensity of change 59–60
 intergroup discrimination 409
 intergroup interventions 329–31
 internal business process measures 77, 462
 internal promotion systems 377
 internalization 272, 276
 interpersonal arrogance 454
 interpersonal justice 237
 interpretation of diagnostic information 118, 148–55
 interpretive frames 11–12
 intervention styles 99–115
 advising 42, 105–6
 challenging 42, 106, 110–11, 113
 collaborative 106–13, 188, 343
 information-gathering 42, 106, 111–12, 113
 intervention style indicator 100–5
 prescriptive 105–6, 112–13
 supportive 42, 106, 107–8, 113
 theorizing 42, 106, 108–10, 113
 interventions 280–1, 319–40
 action research 22, 281, 328, 341–9, 475, 506
 appreciative inquiry 281, 343, 351–63
 business process re-engineering 282, 337, 385–93, 505
 career planning and development 337
 case studies 283–6
 coaching 322–3, 376
 conference method 333–5, 338, 506
 cultural profiling 282, 338, 408, 414–18
 depth of 432–3
 efficacy of 436–7
 employee wellness 337
 facilitating progress through transitions 273–6
 group-based 326–31, 438
 high performance management 282, 337, 374–83
 human process 281, 335–6, 434
 human resource 281, 335–6, 337, 435
 with individuals 322–6
 intergroup 329–31
 lean 282, 337, 394–407, 505
 level of change target 432
 mentoring 322, 323, 324, 376
 mergers and acquisitions 338, 408–11, 444–55
 performance management 337
 positive thinking 324–6
 scientific management 319–20
 selection of 282–3, 430–40
 sequencing 437–9
 sociotechnical systems 293–4, 320–2
 strategic 281, 335–6, 338, 435
 strategy mapping 338
 stress management 337
 survey feedback 331–3
 technostructural 281, 335–6, 337–8, 434
 three-dimensional model 431–2, 433–7
 training and development 281, 337, 365–72, 376
 trans-organizational development 338
 value innovation 54, 67–8, 282, 338, 420–9
 wellness 337
 whole system 331–5, 338
 workforce diversity 337

- interviews 144
 appreciative 356, 360–2
 involvement 251–3, 337–8, 343
 Ions, Colin 94, 447
 Íslandsbanki 167
 isolated roles 231
- Jefferson Pilot Finance 403–4
 jidoka 399, 402
 job design 377, 436–7
 job enrichment 337
 job rotation 376
 job satisfaction 247
 John Lewis Partnership 211
 judgement, suspending 112
 just-in-time (JIT) 395, 399
 justice 237–8, 453–4
see also fair treatment
- kaizen 399
 key performance objectives 390
 KeyChemicals 444, 445, 446, 447, 448,
 449, 453
 Klofsten's business platform model 118,
 130, 138
 Koninklijke Philips 70
 Kotter's integrative model of
 organizational dynamics 117, 129,
 130–3
- laissez faire capitalism 208
 lateral leadership 172
 laws of effect 122
 leadership 163–82
 aligning 159, 165, 171–2
 change strategies and 296
 charismatic 174–5
 collective 175–80
 crisis of 71, 72
 distributed 159, 175–80
 enabling 159, 165, 172–3
 lateral 172
 maintaining momentum 159, 165, 173
 management and 163–4
 power and influence 159–60, 185–9, 250
 role in change success 159, 163–73
 sense giving 159, 165, 168–71
 sense making 159, 165, 166, 168–9, 247,
 249
 situational 174
 styles 174–5
 supporting others 159, 165, 173
 sustaining change 159, 165, 173
 transformational 174–5
 visioning 159, 165, 166–8
see also top teams
- lean 282, 337, 394–407, 505
 learned helplessness 88–9, 106, 323
 learning 25, 33–6, 272, 276, 489–90
 action 342, 343, 506
 action research and 342–3
 collective 489, 501–13
 continuous change and 45–6
 double-loop 34–5, 52, 352, 493–4, 502–3
 experiential 342, 489, 491–9
 ideologies and 509–11
 impediments to 504–11
 increasing returns and 9
 measures 77, 462
 from own experience 489, 491–9
 post-implementation reviews 503–4
 reflection 272, 276, 492–3, 495–8, 503–4
 single-loop 34, 137, 352, 493–4, 502
 training and development 281, 337,
 365–72, 376
 transfer of 368
 transparency and 507–8
 learning charts 496, 497, 498
 learning logs 496, 498
 learning organizations 52
 Leeson, Nick 218
 legal templates 250
 Leicester Royal Infirmary 61–2, 387–8
 letting go 271, 275
 leverage points 280, 311–12
 Lewin's three-step model of change 21–3,
 58–9, 424
 Liberty House 460–1
 Libor scandal 219
 life crises 268
 life cycle models of change 1, 5, 7, 192
 life cycle theory of management fads 430
 life events, adjustment to 266–8
 Likert, Rensis 331
 listening 112
 lock-in phase 13–14
 locus of control 88, 323
 loss frame 191–2
 Loures, Rodrigo 359
 Lyons Confectionery 92–3, 95
- McDonald's 62–3, 483
 McDonnell, John 11
 Machiavellianism 212
 McKinsey 7S model 117, 130, 133–4, 142,
 148
 McPherson, René 253
 Maersk Line 240, 244, 464–6
 Malik, Shahid 11
 management by objectives 430
 managerial arrogance 454
 manipulation 254
 marketplace business model 69
 Marks & Spencer 50
 Martin Dawes 410
 matrix organization structures 312
 means 148
 Médecins Sans Frontières 211, 353, 359–60
 meeting canoe tool 329
 memory 353
 mental contrasting 325
 mental models 249, 492
 shared 48–9, 501–2, 503, 509–10
 mentoring 322, 323, 324, 376
 Mercedes-Benz 423
 mergers and acquisitions 338, 408–11,
 444–55
 microcomputer producers 51–2
- Mid Staffordshire hospitals 201–2, 210,
 217, 218, 221
 Middleton, Debbie 276
 Midland Bank 34
 models
 characteristics of good 118, 139
 entrepreneurial venture creation 24, 460
 psychological reaction stage model
 270–3, 455
see also diagnostic models; mental
 models; process models of change
 momentum, maintaining 159, 165, 173
Money Programme, The 50
 monitoring and reviewing 441–2, 457–68
 Monopolies and Mergers Commission 56
 Moore, Paul 230
 motivation 33, 89–91, 161, 244–63, 354
 case studies 161, 261–2
 commitment strategies 376, 377
 expectancy theory and 255–61
 factors affecting 248–50
 inferred 94–5
 innovation/values fit 485–7
 organizational commitment and 245–7
 psychological contract and 245–7
 ways to increase 251–5
 motivational barriers to change 48, 49
 motivational deficits 89
 music sharing 50
 mutual altruism 211
- Napster 50
 national culture, ethical practice and
 217–18
 National Health Service (NHS) 32, 61–2,
 75, 201–2, 210, 217, 218, 221, 285, 361,
 362, 365, 387–8, 401, 474, 482, 506,
 515–16
 negotiation 188, 254
 neo-institutional theory 47–8
 Nestlé 56
 News International 219
 Nokia 9–10, 90, 168–9, 171
 Norman, Archie 289, 296, 484
 normative embeddedness 47, 49
 Norsk Hydro 485
 North, Jo 174
 Northern Rock 153
 Norwich Union Life 323, 424, 425, 426–8
 Nutrimental Foods 359
- Oakland, John 317
 Oakland's figure of eight framework
 315–17
 obedience to authority 215–16, 217
 obligations 48, 49
 observations 145–6
 Ohio State University 174
 Ohno, Taiichi 395, 396, 400
 on-demand business model 69
 on-the-job learning 376
 open systems planning 334
 open systems theory 4, 44, 128–9, 130,
 136, 320

- operational feedback 24, 459, 460
operator culture 511
organization development 289–90
organization development strategies 279, 291–6
organization mirror tool 330–1, 344, 505, 506
organization thinking 505
organizational biographies 333
organizational citizenship behaviour 454
organizational commitment 245–7
organizational coupling 177–8
organizational culture 502
 cultural profiling 282, 338, 408, 414–18
 culture audits 414
 ethical practice and 217–18
 types 415–17
organizational diagnosis *see* diagnosis
organizational identity 409–11
organizational justice 237–8, 453–4
 see also fair treatment
organizational learning *see* learning
organizational memory 353
organizational silence 228–31, 331
organizational structures
 commitment strategies and 377
 effects on performance 385–6
 matrix 312
output-to-input ratios 75
- Page, Larry 510
parallel organization approach 333
parent firm arrogance 454
ParkCira 69
parochial self-interest 249–50
participation 251–3, 337–8, 343
participatory research 343
path dependence 13–14, 73, 494
path formation phase 13
patterns of change 41, 44–64
 case studies 60–3
 gradualist paradigm 41, 45–6
 punctuated equilibrium paradigm 14–15, 41, 46–53, 71, 72
 typology of change 55–7, 59
pay inequity 237–8, 454
PCBtec 235–6, 247, 450
PDSA cycle 391, 396
peak experiences 354, 355, 356, 359, 360
people issues 25, 33, 157–9
perceptions
 changing 309–10
 of fair treatment 197–8, 237–8, 247, 256, 260–1, 454
Perez, Eva 305–6
performance
 effects of organizational structures on 385–6
 effort–performance expectancies 255, 259–60
 ethical practice and 220
 high performance management 282, 337, 374–83
 indicators of effectiveness 74–7
 key performance objectives 390
 performance–outcome expectancies 255, 259, 260
 performance appraisal 376, 377
 performance management interventions 337
 performance measurement 461–4
 balanced scorecard 77, 78, 462–4
 person analysis 366
 person cultures 416, 417
 personal helplessness 106
 personal transitions 265–78, 454–5
 facilitating progress through 273–6
 personal cost of coping with 266–8
 psychological reaction stage model 270–3, 455
 responses to 269–72
 social readjustment rating scale 266–8
 persuasion 251, 324
 PEST tool 66–7, 150, 151
 Philips 423
 phone-hacking scandal 219
 placebo effect 354
 plan, do, study, act (PDSA) cycle 391, 396
 planning 25, 28–9, 54, 280, 304–18
 in action research 344
 detailed 306–15, 449
 figure of eight framework 315–17
 high level 304–6
 implementation plans 309–11, 315, 449
 open systems 334
 scheduling 313–14
 using diagnostic information 150–5
 playmakers 81–2, 90–1, 232
 police 169–70, 405–6
 political trends 66–7
 politics 159–60, 185–9, 438
 PolyGram 70
 Portugal 305–6
 positive deviance 111
 positive mood 324
 positive thinking 324–6
 post-implementation reviews 503–4
 postmortems 503–4
 power and influence 159–60, 185–9, 250
 Power Construction 504
 power cultures 415, 416, 417
 predetermined change trajectories 7
 preferred future approach 333, 334–5, 506
 preformation phase 13
 prescriptive mode of intervening 105–6, 112–13
 PRIMO-F framework 150, 151
 priority review 505–6
 proactive change 55–7, 59
 problem-solving approach 333
 procedural justice 237, 453–4
 process consultation 328
 process mapping 388
 process models of change 1–2, 4–18, 20–5, 91
 change process model 2–3, 25–38, 444
 dialectical models 1, 5, 7
 evolutionary models 1, 5, 7
 Lewin's three-step model 21–3, 58–9, 424
 life cycle models 1, 5, 7, 192
 reactive sequences 1, 7–8, 14–15, 491
 self-reinforcing sequences 1, 8–15, 47, 492
 teleological models 1, 5, 6, 7
 project groups 337
 projective methods of data collection 145
 prospect theory 191–2
 Prosper-McPherson 261–2
 provocative propositions 357–8
 proximity, ethical practice and 216–17
 psychological commitment to past decisions 10–11
 psychological contract 245–7
 psychological reaction stage model 270–3, 455
 punctuated equilibrium paradigm 14–15, 41, 46–53, 71, 72
 purpose 74–5
 Pygmalion effect 354
- qualitative analytical techniques 147–8
quality circles 337
quantitative analytical techniques 148
questionnaires 144–5
quick wins 95, 173, 454
- railway franchises 63
Rank Xerox 483
re-creation 55, 56, 59
re-engineering *see* business process
 re-engineering (BPR)
reactive change 55–7, 59
reactive sequences 1, 7–8, 14–15, 491
readiness for change 89, 91, 169–71, 248–50, 424–5
 see also motivation
realistic job previews 451
realistic merger previews 451–2
recognition of need for change 25–6, 41–2, 66–84
 agenda for change 80–3
 alignment check tool 78–80
 external sources of change 66–70, 71–2
 indicators of effectiveness 74–7
 internal sources of change 70–2
 sensitivity of top teams 77–8
recruitment practices 376
red tape, crisis of 71, 72
redeployment 377
redundancies 197–8, 247
reflection 272, 276, 492–3, 495–8, 503–4
reinvention 483–4
relationships *see* change relationships
reorientation 55–6, 57, 59
reputation 187, 219–20
Research Center for Group Dynamics 326
resistance to change 26, 47–9, 51, 247–8, 266
 conference method and 334
 denial and 271
 expectancy theory and 255–61
 factors affecting 248–50
 ways to minimize 251–5

- resource dependence theory 190–1, 192
 respect 112, 169
 responsible behaviour *see* ethical practice
 retention practices 376
 retentive capability 509
 reviewing 441–2, 457–68
 reviewing progress 30–2
 revolutionary periods 41, 46–7, 49–50, 51, 52, 70–1, 72
 rewards 296, 314, 377
 rhetorical crafting 175
 rituals 253
 Robertson, Pat 190
 Roelofse, Jolene 224–5
 role cultures 415, 416, 417
 role models 324
 roles
 in communications 231–4
 team 108
 Rowe, Steve 50
- sampling 146
 scheduling 313–14
 Schmidt, Eric 510
 Schmidt, Johnny 244
 scientific management 319–20
 search engines 69
 secondments 376
 selection practices 376
 self-belief 88–9
 self-destructive egotism 210
 self-efficacy 106–7, 178, 323–4
 self-fulfilling prophecies 354
 self-interest 208–10, 249–50
 self-managed teams 337, 377, 430
 self-monitoring 178
 self-reinforcing sequences 1, 8–15, 47, 492
 self-report bias 145
 sense giving 159, 165, 168–71
 sense making 159, 165, 166, 168–9, 247, 249
 sense of agency 106–7, 167, 323–4
 separation 411–13
 sequences *see* change sequences
 service profit chain 463
 set-up costs 9
 seven wastes tool 400
 shareholder interests 294
 shareholder perspective 203, 210
 Shell 211, 219
 shock 270–1, 274
 Shrimpton, Andy 82–3
 silence, organizational 228–31, 331
 Silkeborg Council, Denmark 285–6
 Simpson, Paul 322–3, 369, 371, 374
 single-loop learning 34, 137, 352, 493–4, 502
 Site Security and Secure Escorts 120–2, 128, 142
 situational leadership 174
 situational variables 296–8
 six-box model 117, 130, 134–5
 SKF UK 198
 skill development 22–3
- skills
 change management 91
 helping 113–14
 social consensus, ethical practice and 217–18
 social constructionism 351–2, 495
 Social Darwinism 208
 social embeddedness 178
 social identity theory 408, 409–11
 social influences 77–8
 social intelligence 178
 social readjustment rating scale 266–8
 socially responsible behaviour (SRB) 207
 see also ethical practice
 sociocultural trends 67
 sociotechnical systems 293–4, 320–2
 Sorenson, Jay 66
 sources of change
 external 66–70, 71–2
 internal 70–2
 Spotify 50, 69
 spread errors 483
 spreading change 469–70, 481–8
 stable quasi-stationary equilibrium 20–1, 49, 474
 stage model of psychological reaction 270–3, 455
 stages, ordering of 5–6
 stakeholder analysis 192–5
 stakeholder brainstorm 193–4
 stakeholder grid 108, 195
 stakeholder management 33, 190–2, 195–8, 293, 452–3
 stakeholder mapping 194–5
 stakeholder perspective 75
 extended 203–4
 stakeholders 159–60, 189–90
 ethical practice and 203–6
 standard deviations 148
 standardization 403
 star envy syndrome 485
 starting change process 26–7, 42, 92–6
 states 4–5
 statistics 148
 status distinctions 377
 stickability 469, 473–9
 storytelling 496
 strategic choice framework 87
 strategic coupling 177
 strategic drift 44
 strategic feedback 24, 459–60
 strategic interventions 281, 335–6, 338, 435
 cultural profiling 282, 338, 408, 414–18
 value innovation 54, 67–8, 282, 338, 420–9
 strategic issues 431–2
 strategic search conferences 331, 506
 strategies
 communications 226–7, 238–40, 450, 452
 see also change strategies
 strategy canvas 67, 420, 421, 425
 strategy mapping 338
 stratified sampling 146
- stress management interventions 337
 structural interventions *see*
 technostructural interventions
 substitute products 422
 success, trap of 12, 73
Sueddeutsche Zeitung 218
 support cultures 416, 417
 supporting others 159, 165, 173, 253–4, 273–6
 supportive mode of intervening 42, 106, 107–8, 113
 survey feedback interventions 331–3
 survivor syndrome 197–8, 247
 sustainability 207
 sustaining change 25, 32–3, 159, 165, 173, 469–70, 471–9
 spreadability 469–70, 481–8
 stickability 469, 473–9
 in value innovation 425–6
 SWOT analysis 150–3
 symbolic language 175
 systems-level review 366
 systems thinking 320, 396, 505
 see also open systems theory
- T-group training 436
 tacit knowledge 178
 target costs 397
 task analysis 366
 task cultures 415, 416, 417
 Tavistock Institute of Human Relations 320
 team building 328, 434–5
 team management 174
 team roles 108
 technological trends 67
 technostructural interventions 281, 335–6, 337–8, 434
 business process re-engineering 282, 337, 385–93, 505
 lean 282, 337, 394–407, 505
 technostructural issues 431
 teleological models of change 1, 5, 6, 7
 testing
 in business process re-engineering 391
 in personal transitions 271–2, 275–6
 Thatcher, Margaret 61, 291
 theft, employee 237–8, 454
 theories, espoused 492
 theories-in-use 492, 493
 theorizing mode of intervening 42, 106, 108–10, 113
 theory X and theory Y 375
 Thomas, Hugh 71–2
 three-dimensional model for intervention
 selection 431–2, 433–7
 three-step model of change 21–3, 58–9, 424
 time perspective 35, 75
 top teams 175
 change strategies and 294–6
 sensitivity of 77–8
 see also leadership

- total quality management (TQM) 290, 396, 437
- Toyota, Sakichi 395
- Toyota 219–20, 395, 402–3
- Toyota Production System 395, 396, 399–400
- training and development 281, 337, 365–72, 376
- training evaluation 368–9
- training needs analysis 366–7
- training objectives 367–8
- trajectories
 - constructed 7
 - predetermined 7
- trans-organizational development 338
- transactional change 136, 137
- transfer of learning 368
- transformational change 52–3, 55–7, 58, 59, 136, 137
- transformational change strategies 300–1
- transformational leadership 174–5
- transition management 59
- transition managers 307
- transition state 306, 307
- transitions, personal *see* personal transitions
- translation 45–6
- transparency 236, 507–8
- triple bottom line 207
- Triumph case study 33, 157–9, 160–1, 452–3
- trust 93–4, 169, 232–4, 248–9, 297, 453–4, 509
- tuning 55, 59, 137
- turnover 32–3
- Uber 69, 221, 423
- Ugly Drinks 72
- UK Coal 56–7
- unfreezing 21–3, 28, 58–9, 251, 342
- universal helplessness 106
- University of Michigan 331
- unobtrusive methods data collection 146
- US Army 504
- value curves 67, 420, 421, 424, 425, 426–8
- value innovation 54, 67–8, 282, 338, 420–9
- value, specification of 396–7
- value stream mapping 397, 400
- valued outcomes 255, 256–8
- values/innovation fit 485–7
- venture creation model 24, 460
- vision 28
- visioning 159, 165, 166–8, 357
- Vita Coco 71–2
- voice automation and routing 12–13
- Volkswagen 56, 203, 205–6, 217, 218, 219
- voluntarism 87–91
- Volvo 481
- Walmart 207, 404
- waste, elimination of 397, 399, 400
- Weisbord's six-box model 117, 130, 134–5
- Welch, Jack 294
- wellness interventions 337
- Western Electric 90, 107–8
- whole system interventions 331–5, 338
- WOOP methodology 325–6
- workforce diversity interventions 337
- World Health Organization 283
- Wrack, Matt 11
- X-ray referral process 389
- Xerox Corporation 348–9
- Yates, Mick 53, 67
- zero-sum game 188