

Becoming to Know: Modifying the Focus of Change Management Theories

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ABSTRACT—*Change management is a widely discussed area in current turbulent environment. There is a bulk of literature available discussing the effective change management techniques in organizations in global arena. There are families of theories in change management literature that focus on constructive mode of change where organizational members by creative destruction challenge the institutionalized learning. New cognition process can be introduced in institutionalized leanings in organizations when organizations set aside the institutional processes and allow feedback system that can tolerate ambiguity and permit movement of cognition process from known to unknown state. This paper uses becoming paradigm lens to see the appropriateness of change management theories in providing feedback, allowing development of cognition process at all levels of organizations and support continual learning process. This paper also discusses loopholes in change management literature and proposes modification in theories to achieve the actual essence of changing i.e. persistent learning.*

Keywords—Becoming to know, Change management theories, Knowledge creation theory

1. INTRODUCTION

Change management is considered a structured approach to manage change in organizations which is a byproduct of globalization and constantly evolving environment [1]. Managing change is considered one of the major requirements of workplace today to avoid premature organizational mortality especially for organizations at maturity stage of Organizational Life Cycle (OLC). Due to the augmented environmental complexity including conscious stakeholders, technological advancements and easy access of information, organization are now under the pressure to cope with rapidly growing demands of all concerned [2] with organization's functions to maintain the core purpose of organizations. Change management started evolving as a discipline in the result of rapid change in complexity of environment in 1980's [3] to structurally cope with the change process and align the organizational purpose and outcomes. Historically, strategy was viewed as a mere explanation of causal relationship of factors used in a variance theory [4] and these perspectives were considered adequate to view change in a stable environment where change complexity was simple i.e. shifting from one stable state to another[5]. However, with augmented environmental complexity and resultant increased pace of change points the dynamic nature of change itself and demanded researchers to view change as ongoing journey apart from a simple shift from one unfrozen state to another frozen state [6].

With advancement in change management field, researchers and practitioners started recognizing change phenomenon as change in form, quality or state in an entity [5, 7] rather than simple shift from one state to another in operations. Here strategy, an individual's job, a work group, a strategic business unit, the overall organization, or industries were all fitted under the definition of entity [8]. There is considerable literature available addressing the issue of how and why organizations change taking into consideration the shifting of operations, form, quality and strategy by creating useful distinctions in the form of planned, unplanned, revolutionary, evolutionary, emergent, realized, recurrent and unprecedented change[9-11]. Van de Ven and Poole [7] proposed a typology to explain the literature in change management by categorizing change into two dimensions, mode of change and unit of change. They have proposed four ideal categories in which almost all literature and theories explaining why and how organizations change get fit.

This paper uses teleological and dialectic theories of Van de Ven and Poole [7] categorization of process change theories. The purpose to select these theories or not selecting other two (life cycle, evolutionary) is their mode of change as 'constructive'. By constructive, in case of teleological theories, it is assumed that organizations populate their resource set with purposeful and adaptive individuals who by interacting with each other determine end state and try to achieve that envisioned state while in case of dialectic theories, it is assumed that people interact with opposing point of view in particular phenomenon, and by interacting create 'synthesis' on a certain phenomenon hence change the organization's current state [5].

Teleological theories of change contain many different theories including planned change, rational change models and scientific management [12]. In teleological theories, basic assumption is that organizations are adaptive and deliberate, change process occur due to the need recognition by leaders and conscious people in organization and change method remain rational and undeviating throughout the change period. These theories emphasize the thought process of leaders and change agents as change initiator while individuals termed as unimportant or receive little attention [13].

Dialectic theories of change assume that any pattern including idea, value or norm present in any organization contains its polar opposite in same organizational setting [12]. These theories assume that radical change occur with colliding pattern in organizations and do not assume involvement of all in change process. This family of change theories contains strongly rooted assumption that some people take interest in change (not all) and those some people have polar opposite pattern that collide for effective change [4].

2. EVOLUTION OF KNOWLEDGE CREATION THEORY

Organizational knowledge creation is the process of making available and amplifying knowledge created by individuals as well as crystallizing and connecting it to an organization's knowledge system [14]. Early research on knowledge management suggested that knowledge creation is possible in a spiral form while converting one type of knowledge into another through certain process [15]. In second phase of development of knowledge creation theory dynamic knowledge creation was introduced where three elements were termed as important in knowledge creation including SECI processes, Ba and knowledge assets [16]. In next phase of knowledge creation, enabling conditions rather than the knowledge assets focus was introduced [17]. In fourth phase of knowledge creation theory justification of knowledge created was explained [18]. In fifth phase, Nonaka, Toyama [19] explained a need for shift in paradigm in knowledge creation theory by emphasizing on establishment of knowledge based firms and focused on phronesis. He presented a new view where he argued for knowledge based management rather than knowledge management. He made a call for urgent shift in knowledge management and especially knowledge creation theory by shifting the thinking patterns and paradigm [20].

3. BECOMING TO KNOW

Jakubik [20], by recognizing the need for urgent change in knowledge management literature, discusses need for paradigm shift in knowledge creation theory addressing the major criticism on existing work on knowledge creation. She indicates an urgent need of new knowledge paradigm by using different empirical and theoretical researches on existing knowledge creation literature. She provides *becoming* ontology as essential part of knowledge creation. Argument is built upon the justification that why more human oriented approach is required to understand the knowledge creation phenomenon which can be well comprehended using ontological lens of *becoming to know* rather than changing *knowledge levels*.

Three major components of becoming to know are learning, knowing and becoming [20]. Learning is characterized in three key classes, i.e. first order, second order and third order learning [21]. Knowledge is composed of know *what* and know *how* [22]. The basic theme of *becoming to know* paradigm is when people interact with each other they *become to know* what they know and what they don't know, experience become knowledge [23, 24]. This *becoming to know* create a set of knowledge which, when embedded in routines of individuals (in organizations while discussing organizations as social entities) serve as basics for new knowledge creation in continuous spiral of knowledge.

It is pertinent to note here that while using this knowledge creation paradigm, learners move to unidentified future state without setting prior goals of learning [23, 24]. This paradigm (as figure 1 states) itself explains the knowledge creation along with changing the present state of entities by using spiral of knowledge i.e. changing basics of learning when they move in spiral above every time .

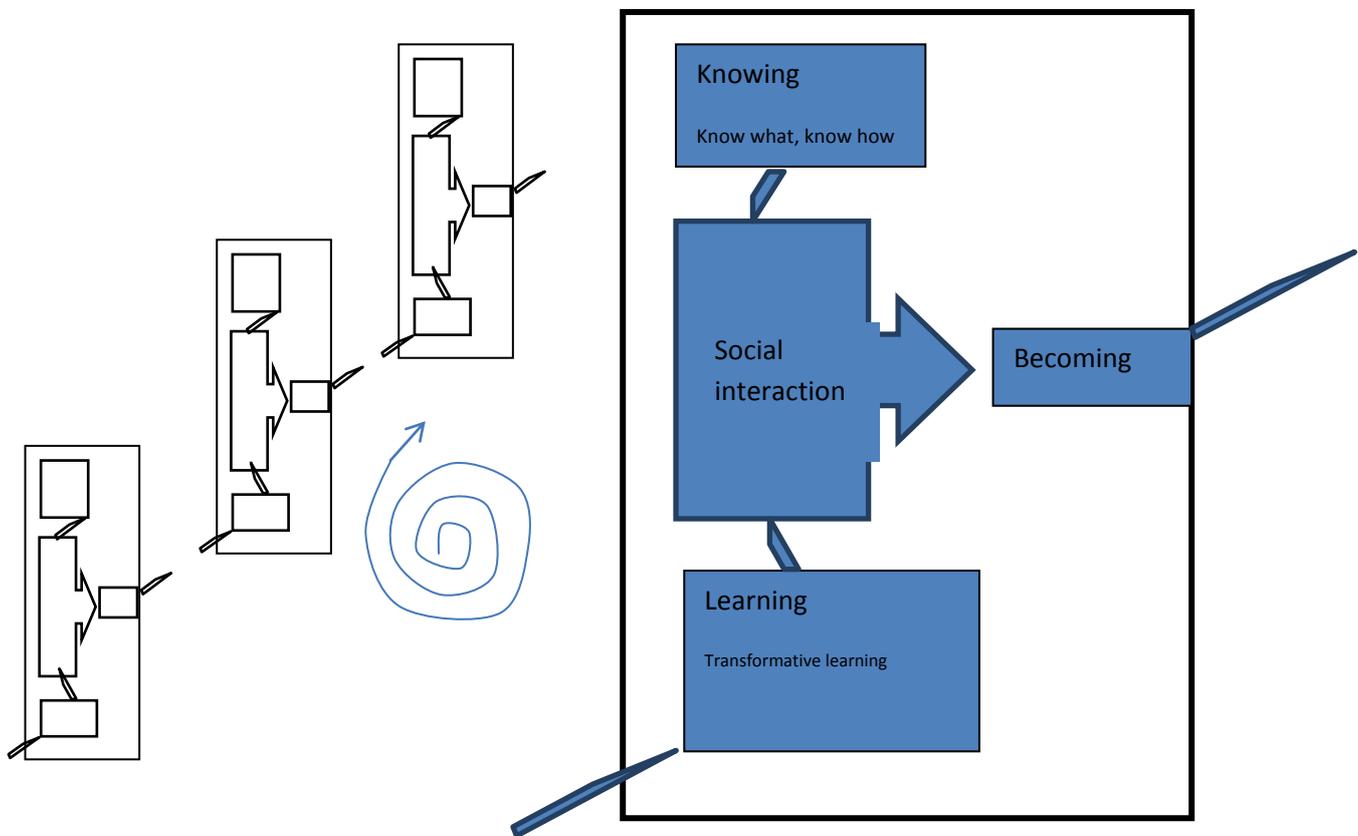


Figure 1

The purpose of this paper is to see the change management theories from the lens of *becoming to know* paradigm. The reason to choose this discussion topic is that change management theories including those using constructive mode are more focused on change process rather than the underlying epistemology of knowledge creation that leads to change. One can question that what is the need to use becoming paradigm or even knowledge creation ontology lens to explain change management? The answer lies in various learning theories that explain the importance of knowledge creation with organizational learning which leads to organizational development and this is possible with the upward curved change in learning and knowledge. Jakubik [20] has mentioned that becoming is change; she has also discussed definitions of organization science where many authors agreed that becoming is dialectic and teleological change. It is consensus that dialectic and teleological change is becoming to know [7, 25-28] hence focuses on knowledge creation and learning spiral rather than the process change management itself.

Knowledge creation through *becoming to know* paradigm in individual capacity is possible when individuals have transformative learning, they have knowledge of what and how and then 'Ba' provides them opportunity to socially interact with each other where they *become* to know and enhance their learning by creating a new set of knowledge served as new transformative learning for future learning and knowledge creation. Transformative learning occurs when one challenges validity of existing set of tasks and try to change the context that posed the problems [20]. This paradigm does not totally negate the legitimacy of SECI model and Ba concept but it shows its reservations in SECI model's basic dichotomies of knowledge ontology and its focus on processes rather than on human and their way of knowledge creation. However *becoming* paradigm still appreciates addition of Ba in knowledge creation process and its importance by using it as an instrument in social interaction for becoming to know in knowledge creation.

4. WHY TO MODIFY THE FOCUS OF CHANGE MANAGEMENT THEORIES?

Before discussing the need of paradigmatic change in change management theories, it is pertinent to note that there is a considerable literature available that points the contradictory and confusing theories and approaches to change management [29]. Edmonstone[30] argues that many change theories from last almost 125 years have been implemented with their fundamental flaws. For example, some reviewers [31] criticize a most commonly and famous model of change

management presented by Lewin which is an advocate of planned change. They [31] state that world is full of ambiguity where flexibility at every stage is necessary. Burnes[29] also points the fundamental flaw in Lewin's model which is assumption of operating in stable state which can predict future well. This is also pointed that existing theories also lack empirical evidences [32]. Todnem By [1] provided a critical review of change management theories and suggested a need of new framework to look at change management process.

5. DIALECTIC THEORY OF CHANGE

The basic assumption of dialectic theory of change is that the organization exists in a pluralistic world of colliding events, forces, or contradictory values that compete with each other for domination and control [12]. Here thesis, anti-thesis, conflict and then synthesis is used to explain the change process. Using the *becoming* paradigm lens to study the dialectic theory of change, it can be pointed that the main focus of this theory is the process by which the change is created not the process which creates knowledge and ultimately enhance organizational learning and hence bring change.

5.1 Learning in dialectic theory

As discussed above, in order to *become* to know, one must have transformative learning (third order learning) where he/she can challenge existing routinized set of activities, beliefs and values. In dialectic theory of change, few people not all, challenge existing set when they feel uncomfortable with it. Transformative learning occurs when people challenge validity of tasks and problems and tries to change the context which posed the problem. At organizational level, this transformative learning should be collective rather than individual [33]. The problem with dialectic theory is that some, not all people challenge the validity of tasks and try to change the context so power and politics become predominant. It also represents the mental models of change agents and leaders and lacks representation of all stakeholders in the organization. In the result the focus becomes dealing with foreseen resistance and managing change process rather than knowledge creation that can move organization upward in learning spiral.

5.2 Knowing in dialectic theory

Knowing includes know what and how. Clearly, dialectic model lacks know how and what at every level of organization i.e. individual, group and organizational by over emphasizing leadership and change agent's point of view [8].

5.3 Becoming to know in dialectic theory

Becoming to know is possible when people interact with each other and become to know what they know and what they do not. From here they learn and create new set of knowledge that becomes one spiral above the previous knowledge. But in dialectic theory few colliding forces create synthesis while prevalence of silence can be observed at rest of the parts of organization.

Crossan, Lane [33] says that organization learns at three levels i.e. individual, group and organization. He also observes that learning and moving upward in learning spiral itself is a change. Institutionalized changes are possible in organizations with effective intuition process of individuals, interaction and integration at group levels and then embedded routine in organizations can result in institutionalized learning. In dialectic model of change management, by over emphasizing few individuals and neglecting the presence of groups makes it clear that here the main focus is on change process while missing underlying essence of change.

From the analysis of dialectic theory, it can be established that synthesis (new knowledge) is created through thesis and anti-thesis through interaction of two colliding forces where power is also used. Some critics comment that conflict arising in this situation of dialectic mode is not always constructive, it can lead to destructive conflict and use of power becomes predominant in these situations [12]. Powerful force either tries to maintain the status quo or forced change is implemented. Through this criticism, it can be argued that main focus here is not to create knowledge rather than to manage change requirement of which is pre-established (envisioned future state).

When it comes to knowledge creation using *becoming* paradigm, dialectic theory does not support it. It severely lacks in learning, knowing and then becoming ontology by not focusing on individual's prior learning, Ba as social interaction instrument and then becoming to know what colliding forces know and what they do not. By not focusing on *becoming* ontology, argument can be built upon its assumption that forces compete with each other for domination and control which is envisioned future state.

6. TELEOLOGICAL THEORY OF CHANGE

Van de Ven and Poole [7] describe a teleological theory as based on the assumption that change is guided by a goal or desired end state. This is assumed in this family of theories that organizations possess purposeful and adaptive individuals who interact with each other, develop mutually agreed end state and then proceed to implement these goals

[12]. The constructive way of managing change is well described by these theories which follow a certain process to change for commonly agreed goals. Approaching teleological theories with the lens of knowledge creation, this process seems creating set of knowledge by mutually agreeing on goals and end states, however the focus of these theories seems to remain on the process itself not on the knowledge creation. Using new paradigm of knowledge creation i.e. *becoming* to know as a lens to approach teleological theories of change, it can be observed that these theories also assume pre-defined state in the whole process as core assumption as dialectic theories do. *Becoming* paradigm of knowledge creation strongly views ‘unknown’ state of learning as important aspect of learning. Learning, knowledge and then becoming to know provide space for new knowledge creation that might not be predictable.

As term teleology refers to ‘the explanation of phenomenon by the purpose they serve’, teleological change theories have different versions and these are understood by different researchers differently broadly categorizing them as rationalists, formative and transformative [34]. Rationalists view change process in constructive teleological models as entities taking autonomous decisions for status quo or change depending upon the desired future state. Formative view of change management models takes change as beforehand predetermined processes and envisioned future state with clearly defined goals and how to achieve those goals. Transformative teleology is not used in teleological theories of change as this approach does not assume future end state and predefined goals to be achieved. Using formative and rationalist teleology in teleological theories, it can be argued that ‘purpose’ of teleological theories in change management literature is to achieve pre-defined future state not to create knowledge.

7. BECOMING PARADIGM AND PROCESS CHANGE THEORIES

Both types of constructive process change theories share common grounds of envisioned future state for managing change. In dialectic process theories, investigation is done to find the true opinion regarding a pre-defined future state whereas teleological theories use formative or rational teleology to achieve envisioned goals. Both families of theories explain the focus on process of achieving pre-determined future rather than on knowledge creation. *Becoming* here is known beforehand while in *becoming* paradigm transformative teleology in change is used in which people move towards unknown future in order to realize both continuity and transformation. Secondly, in *becoming* ontology, people become to know when they move from one known state to another unknown where they explore what they do not know. Do these process theories provide social interaction *Ba* to move to unknown state? Answer seems strongly NO where one family of theories focus on leader and change agent’s mental models (dialectic model) while others restrict envisioned future state where becoming is already known (theological).

Becoming paradigm largely an unexplored territory and needs research in order to embed it in change management theories. The need to use transformative teleology in change management literature is felt due to the fact that by using becoming paradigm with transformative teleology organizations can change learning systems. Changing learning systems which is referred to as deutro learning where the thinking, processes and behaviors for decision making are changed and become embedded in organizational knowledge.

Using transformative teleology in change management literature through becoming paradigm lens can be understood by using metaphors of human *becoming to know* process. Following can be proposed *becoming* to know process in organizations. Jakubik [20] has used three major components for becoming to know paradigm, same will be used for this paper.

7.1 Learning

When people reach at third order learning level (transformative) where they can challenge current set of knowledge, question the validity of tasks and problems and try to change them, they open the ways to new knowledge creation. Here transformative learning has two major parts; one is generalized oriented predispositions and second is set of belief and values[35]. People become transformative thinker when they experience amazing mismatches between their actions and outcomes of those actions. Their existing mental models based on predispositions and set of beliefs and values are challenged by the external factors and their reactions. Same can be seen from the organizational perspective, when organizational *mental models* are challenged by the external factors and people inside the organization see differences in actions and outcomes of those actions, they become transformative learners so as organization. When organizations become transformative learner they can open opportunities for new knowledge creation.

7.2 Knowing

Knowing occurs in individuals when they create concept, ideas and models and when they establish relationships between ideas through reading, speculating, inventing, conversation and interactions. Knowing has two parts, knowing what and knowing how where knowing what includes objects to be studied, values and belief while knowing how

includes tools through which knowledge can be gained. Mapping this same to organizations where know what (organizational objectives and value system) and know how (tools and skills) can be used for knowing to occur.

7.3 *Becoming*

Becoming in individuals with transformative learning level, having established linkages between different ideas, concepts and models, occur when they interact with other people and become to know what they know and what they don't know. This *becoming* changes their mental schemata on a certain issue where they find action and outcome discrepancies (in learning part). This enhances their learning and they become to know more than what they know earlier hence creating a new set of knowledge. It is pertinent to note here that Ba is used here as social space to knowledge creation.

Applying this to organizational setting, where organizational mental schemata can be changed when it interacts in internal and external ecosystem and become to know what it knows and what it does not. Here ecosystem is served as Ba for knowledge creation process of organizations.

Once this *become* to know process starts, roots of which are grounded in transformative learning, organization can successfully change the learning system of organization which is essential for decision making. Moving towards unknown state is successfully possible if organization and people in organization both learn and become purposeful enough to follow self-directed goals to reach commonly benefited outcomes which are possible through *know what* part of knowing and *becoming* to know. Some researchers argue that learning of people is different from organizational learning but at the same time many researchers argue that organizations are made up of human and systems [33]. So, as human are not separable from society where society influence people thinking at the same time is influenced by shared belief and values, same is with organizations. When people are not separable from organizations, it can be pointed that people learning can influence organizational learning and vice versa.

8. CONCLUSION

Both teleological and dialectic theories of change management explain the process of managing change and do not provide system embedded self-directed managing techniques that can use ongoing process of learning. Transformative teleological theory of change can be developed when we observe change process from the lens of becoming to know paradigm where the orders can emerge from disorders through a process of self-organizing unplanned change which is a resultant of embedded knowledge creation process through *becoming* paradigm.

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