CHANGE AND CHANGING: HOW CHANGE PROCESSES GIVE MEANING TO CHANGE PLANS

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INTRODUCTION

Organizations are constantly changing (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Sometimes the changes that take place are unintentional or spontaneous (Orlikowski, 1996); sometimes changes arise from a plan, that is, an informal idea or formal design for changing the organization (Barnett and Carroll, 1995; Beyer and Trice 1978). In this paper we focus on planned change, and we explore the process of moving from the introduction of a plan for change to changing the way work is accomplished.

Architects of change plans hope their plan(s) will "succeed"; but success can be defined in a wide variety of ways. For example, DeLone and McClean's (1992) analysis of measures of success enumerates over 180 measures in 100 works investigating the success of information systems alone. In this paper, we focus on success as defined by expressions of satisfaction. That is, success is determined by participants' evaluations of the plan. We build on research that explores the importance of action for creating the meaning of change (Barley, 1986; Bartunek, 1984; Czarniawska and Jorges, 1998; Latour, 1996; Orlikowski, 1996). Our goal is to understand how organizational participants interested in bringing about change encourage the movement toward satisfying change rather than conditions they consider unsatisfying or no change at all. In order to do this we explore participants' enactment of a process that generates the
meaning of organizational change.

Research has shown that the same plans for change do not always have the same meaning. Indeed, many scholars have shown that the same plan can engender both different actions and different feelings in different contexts (Kaufman, 1981; March, 1981; Barnett and Carroll 1995; Blunt 1997; Lynn, 1998, McKinley and Scherer, 2000; Thompson, 2000). Take the well-documented case of total quality management (Hackman and Wagement, 1995; Westphal, Gulati and Shortell, 1997; Zbaracki, 1998; Lozeau, Langley and Denis, 2002). This research shows that even a well-defined regime for the reform of organizational work is interpreted in various ways over time and in different contexts.

We suggest that there are multiple meanings that emerge when organizations initiate change plans. We detail two kinds in this paper: 1) meanings that define how participants interpret what the plan is about, that is, its content, and 2) meanings participants make that evaluate the implementation of the plan, that is, how satisfying it is. In the case of content, the actions taken in the name of a particular change plan define what the plan is. In the case of evaluation, an individual determines that engaging in new activity has resulted in the ability to do his or her work better or has made the organization better. This helps him or her to evaluate whether the change plan, however it has come to be defined, is good or bad. In practice this distinction is true even for very specified change plans such as TQM (Westphal, et. al, 1997; Zbaracki, 1998). Thus, activities that emerge as teamwork help determine whether TQM comes to be defined as data driven or team oriented. Yet, no matter how the content is defined, if the change has not resulted in being able to do one’s work better, then TQM is evaluated as unsatisfying.
Therefore, we argue that it is important not only to understand the initial content of the change plan, but also the process of its enactment by participants and how that influences the evaluation of its success.

At the heart of the process of changing, we identify two kinds of actions that our informants identify as significant. First, we identify changes to actions that represent change in the organizational rules and resources. Second, we identify changes to actions that represent change in the individual mindsets of the people carrying out change plans. We will detail these components of the change process at greater length in the next section of the paper, but it is important to note that our informants indicate that creating a satisfying change in the way work is accomplished depends on enacting both of these categories of action. Without the combination of both enactments of new rules and new mindsets, the results are not satisfying, but are instead attempts at change that are stifled, coerced, or no change in work practices at all. Table 1 depicts this pattern. We assert that this pattern emerges because of the interdependent and reciprocal nature of structure (organizational rules) and agency (individual mindsets) in the construction of reality or, in the case of change, the construction of a new reality.

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Although we begin with a table that appears to depict a static model of change, we emphasize in this study the importance of studying changing as a dynamic process (Tsoukas and Chia, 2002; Weick and Quinn 1999). For example, combining rule and mindset change does not imply that changes must be simultaneously enacted in both organizational rules and individual mindsets (Bate, Khan, and Pye 2000). In fact, our data suggest that changes in either organizational rules or individual mindsets may promote change in the other at which point the change becomes satisfying. Furthermore, plans cannot change work on their own, but only come to life though the process of day-to-day adjustments made by organizational actors in a particular context. Although the analysis of the design and recommendations of particular change regimes may be fruitful, our research suggests that the plan is only the first step on the path to changes in organizational activity. Our study highlights the importance of the relationship between the change plan and the change process. The change plan generates the opportunities for process and the change process gives meaning to the change plan.

In this paper we begin by mapping out the conceptual underpinnings of our model of how change plans develop meaning. This is followed by a brief discussion of the data we use-- stories of change and changing collected from individuals in the city administrations of two U.S. cities-- and the methods we use to analyze it. Next we present a series of insights with examples of stories that illustrate the different ways meanings manifest themselves in changes in action. We conclude by discussing both the practical and theoretical implications of these insights.
CHANGE PLANS AND CHANGING ACTIONS

Our theoretical assumptions build upon previous researchers' insights into the relationship between change plans and the actions taken to implement them. Some of this work has taken place in the area of technology implementation, a particular kind of organizational change. Barley has shown that the meaning of the introduction of new technology depends on the actions taken to implement the technology (1986). His work emphasizes the existing structures, including the organizational culture, and how these structures influence the actions that are taken. Similarly, DeSanctis and Poole (1994) explore how the structuration process influences how new technologies are appropriated into use in various ways that may be faithful or unfaithful to the intent of the originator. Orlikowski’s work (1992, 2000) similarly emphasizes the structuration dynamics and also explores the role individuals play in the interpretation of technology.

Bartunek’s work focuses on the individual-level understandings of change plans. She develops a theory in which structural change in an organization (i.e. its design, rules, norms) results from an interaction with organizational members' perceptions or understandings, what she terms 'interpretive schemes' (1984). She notes that "the relationship between interpretive schemes and structure is not direct. Rather, it is mediated by the actions organization members take in response to changing understanding or structure" (p.356). In other words, although changes in environment, rules, or mindsets may provide the impetus for change, it is only through action that change occurs. Czarniawska and Jorges (1998) and Latour (1996) make similar claims and apply the metaphor of translation to describe how actions turn ideas into new institutional and technological realities.
For all of these scholars, the relationship between action and change plans is dynamic and reciprocal. Stated another way, the interpretive schemes that give meaning to change plans influence what actions are taken and the actions taken influence the way change plans are understood. Because the relationship is dynamic and reciprocal, it has the potential to be generative. These three features of the relationship define the practice-based view of change as articulated by Orlikowski (1996). She notes that, “every action taken by organization members either reproduces existing organizational properties or it alters them” (1996:66). Thus, we cannot expect, nor do we see, change plans enacted along a precise, pre-conceived course (DeSanctis and Poole 1994). New meanings are generated as the enactment of the plan unfolds.

We view organizational change plans through the lens created by these scholars. Change plans can have many different meanings. The authors of change plans may have various meanings in mind when they propose the change, or individuals may interpret possible courses of change in different ways. Action in terms of work practices, that is, how elements of the plan are appropriated into use, plays a large role in defining the meaning of the change plan. We can illustrate this approach with two examples about empowerment. Empowerment encompasses the ideas of devolving responsibility, self-efficacy and autonomy, and the need for rules and structures that enable and constrain the empowering of employees (Spreitzer, 1997). However, the idea of empowerment, alone, does not create change. As one of our narrators from our interviews quipped:

For example, we tell our employees, go forth and be empowered, you know. Empowerment is a great word, but almost meaningless on Wednesdays. How did I get to be empowered today? What does that mean? (BO #3)

Any discussion of empowerment must also include the actions that constitute
empowering and being empowered for that particular organization. And, indeed, in the stories our informants tell about empowerment many actions are portrayed. For example, stories about empowerment included routine actions, such as staff meetings in which lower level employees take the lead in discussing the work to be done. Empowerment is also illustrated in stories about extraordinary measures that employees take to fulfill their responsibilities, such as working all weekend while their supervisor is out of touch in order to correct problems with a report written by a consultant. Both the actions that are repeated on a regular basis and the extraordinary action define and give meaning to the idea of empowerment.

Our stories indicate that there is also another kind of meaning that it is useful to take into consideration: an evaluative meaning. Storytellers indicate their satisfaction or dissatisfaction with change and the way change plans are enacted. The meaning of the plan is often implicated as, for instance, unsatisfactory empowerment is seen as not empowering. Take, for example, the following story:

...if the reorganization was intended to result in a more empowered management team, I think we've moved in that direction, but I don't think that [it’s been] a smooth transition or one that has not been without some excess at times. I don't think that everybody at the management level accepts it. ...

I’ll give you an example. I’ll be moving ahead with certain initiatives that result in some change in some of the employee classifications, job descriptions, everything else. If I haven't involved human resources in it, right from the get-go, I am at backstep and go and get my ticket punched there and make sure that he’s ok with it, even though the outcome is the same... If I was empowered, why do I have to go through this? (NO #1)

The unsatisfying quality of the way the change is enacted alters the meaning of the plan. Is the reorganization (the plan) really about empowerment? Or is it just about the appearance of empowerment?
A practice theory perspective helps explain the importance of combining individual-level and organizational-level changes. From this perspective, individual agency and organizational or societal structures are interdependent and reciprocal. What individuals do is constrained and enabled by their structural context and individual’s actions contribute to the creation of the structural context. Scholars have shown that schemas or ideas are integral to agency (Bartunek, 1984; Emirbayers and Mische, 1998). What people do is related to what they think appropriate to the context in which they operate. As Bourdieu has shown this reciprocal relationship can be extremely stable (1977, 1990).

The implementation of change plans represents the potential for moving from one context to another, and the actions taken will determine whether that potential is realized. Change in organizational rules and resources alter the context in which actions are taken, making new actions possible and sometimes inevitable, but they can never completely specify how people will act. There will always be room for discretion and interpretation.

Take, for instance, the implementation of teamwork. Even when rules require people to work together on teams, if the actions are taken with old understandings (e.g., people think they are in competition with one another), then the enactment of teamwork will be partial and unsatisfying. Likewise, if individuals develop an understanding of teamwork, but the hierarchy in their organization, the reward systems or other rules and resources make it difficult to work with others, then the change will be partial and unsatisfying.

The combination of organizational rules and individual mindsets that support a particular way of defining the change plan allows the change plan to create a new way of
doing work that is perceived as a better way of doing work. This combination is what is satisfying.

**METHODS**

We explore how change plans come to have meaning by examining stories that organizational members tell about changes in their organizations. In stories illustrating satisfying change, narrators specify the steps that contributed to making the change 'successful' in their estimate; in the case of unsatisfying change, narrators identify what was missing.

Stories are a valuable source of data because people often make sense of the world and their place in it through narrative form (Bruner, 1990; Gee, 1985; Kohler Reissman, 1993, Mishler, 1986). Through telling their stories, people distill and reflect a particular understanding of social and political relations. The sequencing of narratives like stories is important because the structure reveals what is significant to people about various practices, ideas, places, and/or symbols (Young, 1996). In addition, stories often act as exemplar; that is, for the teller they represent a concrete summation of ideas that may be difficult to articulate. Although someone may not be able to analyze exactly how change occurred, they can show it through an example of changing. Thus, both the structure of stories and their content reveal key insights about issues that are relevant to the storyteller.

Stories also offer rich sources of information because they often carry implicit meanings. Storytellers naturally omit certain kinds of information, for example, what they consider basic, taken-for-granted facts shared by teller and listener. Alternatively,
by leaving unspoken potentially controversial or not taken-for-granted aspects of the argument, the speaker may stave off disagreement without jeopardizing the persuasiveness of the story. (Feldman and Sköldberg, 2002) Looking for the implicit messages within the story opens up valuable, but sometimes overlooked issues, opinions, or motivations that enable the researcher to go beyond the words contained in the text. Analyzing stories that participants tell provides insight not only into what is happening but also into the understandings of the participants about why and how it is happening (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2000; Feldman and Sköldberg, 2002; Morrill, Yalda, Adelman, Musheno and Bejarano, 2000).

**Data Gathering**

In order to uncover and explore the change dynamics outlined above, we examine stories told by members of two city administrations that are engaged in change: Charlotte, North Carolina and Grand Rapids, Michigan. We chose these cities because we knew that they were actively engaged in implementing change plans and that interviews would yield stories about both satisfying and unsatisfying change. Moreover, these two cities had implemented very different change plans, with Charlotte focusing on what they referred to as structural change and Grand Rapids focusing on what they referred to as cultural transformation. Data were gathered with the intent of comparing these two approaches to change.

The first author collected data from documents, observations, and interviews from a variety of sources in each city. Her first contact in Charlotte was during an interview with the Deputy City Manager in 1997. This led to a follow-up trip in November of 1998, where she conducted formal interviews with five top managers and two mid-level
managers. Also in 1998, she went to Grand Rapids for a 2-hour long meeting that included six members of the top executive team, the president of the largest employee union, and three employees who had been active in a cultural transformation process going on in the city. Subsequently, she conducted seven individual interviews with Grand Rapids' city employees from a variety of positions and departments. This paper makes particular use of the data provided by the interviews with organizational members. The average duration of interviews in both cities was one hour. The interviews from Charlotte and Grand Rapids yielded 154 distinct stories.

**Data Analysis**

We analyzed the data with the intent of exploring the process of change or how the organizations moved from change plan to change. We used a method of narrative analysis based in both rhetoric and semiotics that enabled us to reveal the important yet often unspoken logical assumptions embedded in stories (Feldman and Sköldberg 2002; Feldman, Sköldberg, Brown and Horner 2003). This analysis involves several steps. First, we generated summaries of the role change played in each story. Then, we identified semiotic oppositions-- implicit contrasts between key elements-- embedded within the story. Oppositions facilitate analysis because elements of a story often have meaning based on what they are implicitly contrasted with, in other words, what they are *not*. In other words, a storyteller can create a sense of what is right about something without ever talking about it, only by talking about what is wrong with its opposite. Subsequently, for each story we constructed syllogisms-- formal patterns/constructions from rhetoric-- that place into logical form the points the storyteller is conveying through the story. This process allows the researchers to interpret both the explicit and implicit
elements of the argument that the storyteller is making. It focuses the researcher’s attention on the implicit-- the arguments that remain unstated-- and gives the researcher tools to transform those tacit meanings into tangible data. Moreover, because stories often have multiple arguments, this form of rhetorical analysis facilitates disentangling the various arguments in a story. The arguments can then be coded for the various themes relevant to the researcher’s agenda.

The first level of coding identified expressions of satisfying change and unsatisfying change. Stories about satisfying change contain a wide variety of sentiments, both explicit and implicit, that express attitudes and beliefs about a plan for change. The explicit comments addressed positive assessments of the plan such as "I think we’re doing better" or "We’re really proud of that" or that the change process is an "enriching opportunity." Sometimes narrators indicate satisfaction through how the change feels:

So I don’t know if we’re doing it the best, but what we’re doing is working for us. (DE#5)

That doesn’t mean that the organization has evolved without some difficulty but at least everybody knows where we’re headed and where we’re going, what we’re trying to do. (WA#1)

Sometimes narrators indicate satisfaction by describing the effectiveness of changes to work:

And you almost thought they were a department, I mean they functioned like a department even though they had people from multiple departments. And there was no authority, no turf problems. (CR#2)

We’re even more receptive now to letting the community inform us what it is that we need or should be providing. (VA#5)

By contrast, stories of unsatisfying change were marked by the statements that
were quite different, for example "I mean I didn’t like the way the whole process came down." They talk about "resistance to the idea" or that "it's insane" or "the way things stack up now it’s pretty cumbersome." Sometimes references to dissatisfaction describe feelings and beliefs:

I’m confused. I’m not sure this is like a change-over point and people are unsure. (BY#1)

Talking about the culture of this organization, I don't think everybody believes in it yet. (NO#2)

And sometimes they describe procedures:

I think we got what I would describe as a fairly superficial, one-size fits all kind of introduction to the concept (LA#9)

It’s a very good idea, but yet there was not a lot of attention paid and so it’s very difficult to have this one person sitting out in a neighborhood trying to pull all these services in. (MA#1)

I’ve been kind of cynical about this because it struck me that we’re being kicked around as kind of a Holly-go-lightly kind of an effort. (SC#4)

Once we had established the dichotomy of satisfying and unsatisfying meanings of change, we wanted to understand more about how these evaluations were generated. In order to explore the differences between stories about satisfying change and unsatisfying change, we coded the themes embedded in the arguments represented by the syllogisms. Our approach to thematic coding was both inductive and iterative. In other words, we allowed the theory to emerge from the data through multiple rounds of analysis and interim explanation building (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Huberman and Miles 1994), rather than beginning with a preexisting set of theoretical propositions (Yin 1994). Initially our codes were content-related, such as stories about particular kinds of change plans (e.g., competition, performance evaluation) or about those who were involved in change (e.g., management or employees). Later, codes emerged that were process-
related such as stories about particular ways of bringing about change (e.g. communication, empowerment) or about what kind of change individuals enacted in response to the plan (e.g. changes to mindset or changes to rules).

**Rules and Mindset.** One particular set of process themes became more important as the analysis progressed. These were different kinds of change regimes that were identified by the storytellers. Participants in Charlotte described their change regime in terms of "structural" change, which was largely characterized by overhauling work rules and responsibilities. Charlotte's plan for change involved reducing the number of departments (and department heads) from 26 to 13 and flattening the hierarchies within each department. Grand Rapids' change plan was called "cultural transformation" and sought to change how people think about their jobs and the beliefs, emotions, and commitment people brought to their work. They conducted 'visioning' events that focused on values, what values they held in common and what values they wanted to promote. These two plans correspond to the distinction in the literature on change made between organizational design (structural change) and organizational development (organizational change) (Bate, Khan, and Pye 2000).

Although the designation of these two cities' change regimes as "structural" and "cultural" is common in some work on change, and, more importantly, comes from the our informants themselves, we must clarify the use of these terms for the purpose of this paper. From some perspectives, what is distinguished separately in the stories as culture (schemas for thinking about work) is simply a certain aspect of structure (Giddens 1984; Sewell 1992). From a theoretical perspective we agree. Because the narrators from these different organizations understood culture and structure to mean different things,
however, it makes sense for us to distinguish between them as well.

To distinguish between them and yet avoid the confusion that using these particular terms would entail, we translate the labels of the two change regimes into rules change and mindset change. This language is not arbitrary, but is consistent with the meanings our narrators attached to structure and culture, respectively. For our narrators, structure tends to refer specifically to organizational rules and resources, including reward structures, training, physical location, features of performance evaluations, etc. By comparison, when our narrators talked about cultural change, they focused on the individual and how individuals define and understand their jobs; in other words, culture was about individuals' particular mindset. Cultural change encompassed beliefs such as trust or vision and interpersonal, emotional issues such as caring, integrity, and valuing other people's work. Here's how one narrator from Charlotte contrasts the implementation of changes in structure and mindset:

We are just completing our re-engineering of our Department... we looked at the structure of the organization, we found a structure we reorganized, we consolidated people, I am the first chief of the new consolidated structure of the county agency and the city agency. Basically when I got here, I was in two departments, functionally... so it took me a year to work for reorganization and change in structure... but [now] we're changing other things-- changing the roles, redefining the roles of everybody from the police officer on up to myself... Police sergeants are viewed as coaches and mentors as opposed to just, you know, checkers, checking up on what you're doing and so we're going through that process [too]. (NO#3)

In this excerpt, the narrator clearly contrasts changes in rules/structure, exemplified by the consolidation of departments, with the changes in mindset/culture, represented by the way people view police sergeants. This dividing line between the organizational structure of the workplace and the individual understandings of the work was prevalent among our narrators.
After several rounds of coding and analyzing and re-analyzing syllogisms, we discovered that the either/or nature of the rules/mindset framework had major limitations. We assumed that our coding would indicate that Charlotte stories emphasized rules and resources as the way to bring about change and that Grand Rapids stories emphasized mindsets as the way to bring about change. We were surprised, however, to find that storytellers in each city mentioned rules and mindsets with virtually identical frequency. In both Charlotte and Grand Rapids, every storyteller has at least four or five stories that touch upon issues of rules. In fact, 81% of the stories (124 out of 154 total stories) have a mention of rules, and storytellers from the two cities bring it up the same amount of the time (82 % vs. 79%, or 57 vs. 55 stories). Similarly, while 74% Grand Rapids stories talked about mindset, 71% of Charlotte also referred to mindset, even though they intentionally initiated a "structural" change process that focused on rule changes. These findings provoked us to go beyond the storytellers’ own depictions of the change as specifically cultural transformation or structural change and look more closely at how they were describing how change to work was achieved.

In many stories changes in rules and changes in mindset were intermingled; that is, both kinds of change were taking place simultaneously or in conjunction. In other stories it was difficult to label the changes taking place as either definitively mindset or rules, particularly when it came to specific, newly generated, and informal actions that were being instituted by our storytellers and their colleagues. For example, in a story about empowerment, workers came in over the weekend to correct problems in a consultant's report. On the one hand, the rules had changed so that it was the employees’ responsibility to make sure the work was done. On the other hand, the employees had a
feeling of empowerment that lead them to understand their jobs in a different way.

INSIGHTS

This analytical process of coding and categorizing led us to explore in more detail the relationship between rules and mindset. The following sections detail four insights that this exploration yielded and stories that exemplify the insights. First, stories about satisfying change often involved changes in both organizational structures and individual mindsets. We refer to this as enacted change. Enactment consists of an organizational and an individual aspect: the enactment of organizational rules and resources that guide and facilitate an work and the enactment of ways of thinking about work. Second, when change plans are not associated with both rule enactment and mindset enactment, change plans are often experienced as unsatisfying. Change can be unsatisfying because it is seen as not happening or because it is seen as merely symbolic in one of two ways, coerced or stifled.¹ Third, changes in the rule enactment may lead to changes in mindset enactment and changes in mindset enactment may lead to changes in rule enactment. Although it is the combination of change in both domains that leads to new work practices that give a satisfying meaning to the change plan, the transformation need not be simultaneous; change in one domain may lead to change in the other. Fourth, the change process is generative and cyclical. In particular, the enactment of satisfying

¹ We must, at this point, acknowledge that our sample of stories does not include another way in which change plans could be evaluated as unsatisfying. The change plan could be enacted, but the storyteller could think that the change was bad. Though we had stories in which the storyteller related being skeptical about the change plan, we do not have stories in which the storyteller relates that the change plan really changed the way people did their work but changed it for the worse instead of the better.
change creates the possibility of new plans or new ideas for what the change plan could mean and, hence new actions.

1st **Insight: Satisfying change entails both organizational rules and individual mindsets**

The numbers indicate that the vast majority of stories by all storytellers in both cities refer to both organizational structures and individual mindsets. There are, of course, many ways that these two variables can co-occur in a story. In the stories about satisfying change, rules and mindset do not simply appear concurrently, they work together. In describing the movement between ideas and actions, our storytellers often talked about the importance of combining both organizational rules and individual mindsets. Working in teams, for instance, is a fundamental part of many management reforms in the public and private sector. Our storytellers point out that it is not only the teamwork structure but also the teamwork mindset that is important to changing work practices. In the following excerpt from a story a manager from Charlotte, NC talks about the importance of both rules and resources and mindset to bring off the idea of team:

> We all know that you can’t just throw people together and say “you’re a team”. And the first iteration is just going through a process making sure everybody understands what a team is all about... The second iteration is really going through and teaching them problem-solving methods... At the same time they have to actually function. My viewpoint is people need to know what a team is. People need to know that different people have different roles on a team and getting those concepts, that’s the easy part. The hard part is actually working together and understanding the dynamics... you really need to put that support system in because it helps them understand the fundamentals... Obviously it takes a very skillful facilitator for that team or at least someone at sometime on the team listening and understanding and being able to troubleshoot for all that to come together. (WA #10)
Note the interplay in this excerpt between individual mindsets and organizational rules and resources. You can put people together in teams and they have different roles. That is a basic application of new rules. However, the narrator makes clear that these rules need to be combined with understandings about what a team is all about and the dynamics of teamwork. The rules about roles alone will not enable the new team to be successful. Creating these new understandings among team members, however, often requires resources, like a support system including a skillful facilitator. According to the narrator, for teamwork to work or "come together," it must be both rules and mindset. It combines new rules that create teams and teach people how to be team members, new understandings about team dynamics, and new resources for team support.

The following story also makes a strong statement about the importance of both mindset and rules. In fact, the central point of the story underscores the importance of 'vision' to supplement the structural changes that the city administration is undergoing. As the narrator says, "Without vision, structural changes are just rearranging the deck chairs. Vision supplies a direction for the new vehicle." This is his story:

...my view is that you’ve got to have your organization aimed in a direction with a sense of expectations of how you’re going to contribute to this being a better place to live or to do business. Otherwise all you’re doing is arranging and re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic. To me that’s what most government is about just arranging and re-arranging departments. They’re not tactically taking their community in a direction that’s going to make it better... And this has really gotten into the organization and one of the things that I think really has made a big difference is the City-within-a-City initiative... In the 1980’s, we were going through a tremendous, rapid growth like sort of what we are into right now. And when you looked at Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte and you did a socio-economic analysis we were healthy, wealthy and wise - what’s the problem folks?  
Well, we had broken the community up into sub-areas and were doing different plans and we identified one essential City district that was about 60 sq. miles with 73 neighborhoods and we did that statistical analysis and it just about knocked people’s socks off because what you saw was you name the American
city that you don’t want to be like and we were beginning to see those seeds: the highest incidence of violent crime, drug abuse, low-educational attainment, poverty, teen-pregnancy…. The next step out of that, we took those 73 neighborhoods and did a very detailed analysis, neighborhood by neighborhood and we used sort of a profile of fragile, threatened and stable neighborhoods and got real focused on what needed to be done. That analysis became a guidebook for council to adopt a city within a city policy. The City Manager and Council basically said now “All city departments when you put your budget together, you’ve got to demonstrate how you’re going to contribute to mitigating these issues these problems or take advantage of opportunities.”

All of a sudden you’ve got department heads thinking about not how do I make roads better or how do I deal with storm gratings but how do I deliver my services in such a way that I’m contributing to correcting these issues? Geographically and neighborhood focused. Engineering for example – storm drainage. They had an analytical system that ranked all storm drainage problems City wide and lo and behold you know what happened, none of those neighborhoods ever ranked on the list. Cause there were little problems here and there. When you have suburban problems that were washing out whole communities it didn’t rank, so engineering began to restructure their funding formula so that they segregated out funds that they didn’t have to use city-wide, they had a city-within-a-city orientation... And they begin to reorient how they think about that system. That’s how a broad policy can really change how people think about the service they deliver. (CR #5)

During the phase of our analysis that included constructing logical syllogisms, we identified the following arguments being made about change:

- Restructuring without vision is just rearranging deck chairs. We have restructuring and vision. Therefore, we are not just rearranging the deck chairs.

- The ability to address city problems requires restructuring and vision. We have restructuring and vision. Therefore, we are addressing city problems.

The major premises of both of these syllogisms make claims about what it takes for a plan to be translated into satisfying change. The original change plan still fundamentally focuses on changes in organizational structure and rules, what this same interviewee had referred to as an “earthquake” earlier in the interview. But the structural changes are not effective unless they are combined with changes in mindset – people
have to think about their jobs differently. The mindset of the city administrators at the beginning of the story was one of satisfaction with the status quo because the city-- as a whole-- was "healthy, wealthy, and wise." The introduction of a new rule, embodied by the neighborhood analysis, revealed problems centralized in particular places. This in turn led to new ways of thinking among the various city departments. The narrator implies that without a new way of thinking about providing service, the rule changes would not have resulted in the change plan's goal of better service.

The conclusions to both syllogisms identify the story as being about satisfying change. They are not just rearranging the deck chairs, but doing something worthwhile. They are addressing city problems. This sense of satisfaction is reflected in the last line of the story: "That's how a broad policy can really change how people think about the service they deliver."

**Turning unsatisfying change into satisfying change.** We found that often narrators' stories emphasized the necessity of changes to both kinds of enactment by telling stories that contain two stages. First, the narrator describes how change was unsatisfying when only one kind of enactment was involved, and then he or she describes the progression toward change when the other kind of enactment is forthcoming. For example, one of our stories, told jointly by two narrators below, described the process of introducing competition as a way of improving job performance and productivity. Competition for this group involved both changes in mindset and rules of work, and, according to the narrators, that is why the change succeeded in generating better ways of working:

*L:* ...the best example we’ve got right now... we call it special transportation services, the people who provide paratransit services for the disabled. And we’ve
tried over there for ten years... to make that service more efficient, to get people to work a little harder... we didn’t have very many measures of productivity, and even if we had, I’m not sure we would have seen very much improvement.

And these guys got directly into competition with the private sector three years ago, and realized that they would not continue to provide the service [unless they did] a better job, put in a bid ... and they won it. They were all elated.

And then they found out, by God, that they would have to deliver. And they got incentives built in... and they didn’t make those incentives. They came close, but they didn’t get any money. And that bothered them. ... So, by God, they’re in the second year now of the contract, they’re working harder, and smarter, and doing better, and we’re getting more people transferred per dollar expended. But they turned from being pretty laid back to being fairly intense...

A: ... if there’s an employee missing, the labor crew chief is out there doing it rather than bringing in somebody on overtime.

(LA #4)

First, the storytellers attribute the failure of previous efforts toward greater efficiency to a lack of both official "measures" and to an intangible other source. Yet even the introduction of a rule change, competition and the new bid contract did not create the desired changes in action until failure to meet the standards began to "bother" the employees involved in the change. They began to understand that it wasn’t just about winning the bid but also about changing the way they work so that they could deliver on the bid. The result is a change in the way they are working – “they’re working harder and smarter and doing better.” The final evidence that the change plan has been translated into a new way of doing work is a specific work practice that instead of bringing someone in on overtime, the labor crew chief is "out there doing it" – filling in for the person who is missing.

In the following story, the point is made in a different way. The narrator tells about a change that was at first conceived as a temporary change. He argued that it really wouldn’t work as a temporary change because making the change temporary does not
indicate a change in mindset:

We took the time clock out of the water repair division. There were endless fights about it ... people coming in a minute late and finally the department head and I sat down and we discussed all the options and Herman Miller and Steelcase were doing away with time clocks and I said, look if somebody on my crew is late, they know where I go to coffee. They’ll be there. If they haven’t called they’ll be there by the time coffee’s over and they’ll know where the job is. What’s the big deal? And again I personally hate time clocks. He said, okay, we’ll experiment. We’ll pull the time clocks off for six months. I said you know that doesn’t work. It really doesn’t. What you’ve got to do is say, no more time clocks. You’re responsible to be here at 7:00 in the morning and you’re responsible to leave at 3:30 unless you’re working over time and those are the parameters I’m giving you. Those are the contractual parameters. Accept that responsibility. He said you’re right. (BY#6)

If management took the time clocks out temporarily, it wouldn’t give the message to the workers that they are responsible for when they arrive and depart from work. The narrator believes that in order to achieve the desired change of having employees take responsibility for their work, the time clocks must go. However, he argues with the department head about making a rule change (removing the time clocks) temporarily. He asserts "you know that won't work," and that the rule change must be permanent from the outset. Implicit in this assertion is the idea that employees won't respond, they won't change their mindset, if the manager does not demonstrate a commitment to the belief that workers are accountable to go along with the rule that workers are accountable. The provisional rule would demonstrate that the department head's mind had not changed.

This storyteller goes on to tell about how successful the change was when the time clocks were taken out permanently. People not only were more likely to come to work on time, but the change also fostered a new atmosphere in which workers did not keep track of each other’s behavior but concerned themselves with taking responsibility for their own behavior.
2nd Insight: Rule or mindset changes alone are unsatisfying

So far, we've looked at stories that ultimately describe satisfying change. Not all change plans, however, resulted in satisfying change. We have identified three forms of unsatisfying change. These are all change plans that were not fully enacted. These outcomes came about when either rule or mindset enactment or both did not emerge. One is what appears to be no change. Storytellers express the feeling that nothing has changed. Neither rules nor mindset are noticeably affected by the change plan. The other two are forms of symbolic change. In stories about these kinds of change storytellers express a feeling that the changes that have taken place are not substantial. We've identified two kinds of symbolic change. One involves rule change without mindset change. We refer to this situation as coerced change. That is, people are initially forced by the rules to make changes to work, but either find ways around those rules or are unsatisfied with the new system. The other symbolic change involves mindset change without rule change. We refer to it as stifled change. In either case the change is partial or unrealized rather than thorough and substantial change.

The following story illustrates the "no change" outcome. As discussed in the previous section, plans for change can be nullified when either mindset or rule enactment do not support the change. The following story illustrates what happens to the best-laid plans:

... We did a workshop on banishing bureaucracies and I sat at the table with people from the Water Department people who represented pumping, filtration, customer service, repair, business office...in other words all different divisions...no continuity other than we worked for the Water Department. And for our two-day project we designed a newspaper...a departmental newspaper...that would go out to all the separate divisions because we're very scattered. Everyone was enthusiastic about it right up until the last day when the question was asked, what are you willing to do within the next 30 days to start this project? People at the table essentially
panicked. They said, now wait a minute, this was a hypothetical situation. I said, well, it started that way, but now we’ve all agreed that this is a great idea, so what are you willing to do to make that happen? One by one people said, there’s no way I could find time away from my regular duties. There’s no way I could do this...blah, blah, blah, blah. I’m unwilling to take the individual step of responsibility to make it work. I think that’s coupled with a lot of things, but just unwilling to take that step. That’s really...that drove to me how much we rely on other people to take the blame. Oh, my God. You’re asking me to do something? What if it fails? (BY #2)

Here the plan for change involved producing teamwork among the disparate water department employees, yet after a promising start, the action embodying the teamwork--the creation of the newspaper--fizzled. The storyteller gives us two explanations for why people backed away from the plan for a newspaper. One explanation was based in rules: people had no time away from their regular duties to engage in the activity. The other was based in mindset: people were unwilling to take responsibility. Although the participants appeared "enthusiastic" about the change plan, there was no change in either rules or mindsets to support a new kind of work on their part.

The next two stories show how some change is more symbolic than substantial. Note that symbolic change can lead to substantial change. In fact, the potential is implicit in the word “symbolic” which can mean full of meaning or emblematic as well as empty or insubstantial. As scholars of organizational hypocrisy have shown us, actions can become more closely aligned with intentions over time (Brunsson, 1985; March and Olsen, 1976). Sometimes what appears to be hypocritical or symbolic is simply incremental. This point is developed more fully in the 3rd insight in which changes in either rules or mindset can be seen as a trigger to changes in the other.

In these stories, however, the narrators imply that the changes have been less than satisfying. The first example is a story of stifled change, wherein the new mindset
emphasizing customer service is constrained by a lack of change in the old rule book:

When I came we had an internal group that was working on revising a policy manual... So, of course as one of the new directors I was asked to come in and meet with them and tell them my philosophy... They said, tell us what you think about what we’re doing. I said, I think you ought to throw the whole dang book away and keep one policy that says to do what you feel is fair for the customer and it blew their minds... My employees want to solve a problem with the customer, take care of something, get it taken care of. And the biggest problem they have is that we in the administration have one specific instance that comes up, and our reaction is to do a 10 page policy as a result of that. Then we then tie the hands of the people who are out there trying to take care of [the customer]... It’s overkill. (BE#12)

The narrator explains that his employees have embraced the plan for change that emphasizes customer service. However, the rules have not changed in accordance with that move toward customer service. Instead, the administration continues in the old tradition of overwriting the policies. In this way the lack of rule change "tie[s] the hands" of those employees thus stifling new, customer-oriented practices.

Another example of stifled change is the story of the unsatisfying empowerment plan we included at the beginning of the paper. The narrator implies that the change toward greater empowerment is more apparent than real. Reorganization was intended to empower employees, yet this storyteller must still "get [his] ticket punched", or get signoff from another unit, before moving forward with a new initiative.

The next story is an example of coerced change, that is, change in rules without change in mindsets. The narrator is telling about the implementation of a change plan for "continuous improvement." The first part of the story relates how a rule change alone did not work:

So, what happened is we trained the FTS folks, the ones who had the contract. These are people, they sit down, they get someone who could read and write at least at a level that they can do their reports. Well, here come our street maintenance folks who can't necessarily read and write. Well the city had an
initiative about '92, I think, where they decided everybody was gonna be able to read and write, and the street maintenance people were telling me that they forced everyone to sit down and take a test and humiliated them, humiliated our field staff... (LA#5)

The organization wanted everyone to read and write, but simply mandating it, "forcing" people to participate, led to humiliation. However, the rest of the story shows how combining new rules with new understandings about the rules was successful.

...sitting down with people for two days, with people who had never been asked to sit down... and we said, this is continuous improvement and we gave them all the reasons. We talked with them about the reasons, our jobs were going, it could be competition, benchmarking, our job could die... So, here’s a continuous improvement [plan]... Some of us are back here with reading and writing skills, or we were able to, and have forgotten, or we never were. And we said, this is a whole team of people. We said, it doesn’t matter where you are. I said, I’m getting my Master’s, I’m here. But that doesn’t matter. It only matters that I keep on improving. And improving is getting better, learning more skills, and lots of improvement on basic skills, like reading and writing. Now we have a whole group of people who are interested in basic literacy, and we have a little team, we’ve teamed up with the community college, and we have some people who are going there. (LA#5)

So by both changing the rule about literacy, but also sitting down with people to explain the reasons behind the rule, and how it applied to everyone in the organization, convinced employees to get on board.

As shown in the literacy story, the lack of connection between rules and mindset may be temporary. As some of the earlier stories have shown, rule change or mindset change can follow rather than being simultaneous. Moreover, several of our stories suggest that changes in one actually lead to changes in the other.

3rd Insight: Changes in Rules or Mindset may lead to changes in the other

While our storytellers emphasize the importance of both rules and mindset enactment in order to bring about satisfying change, they do not suggest that both have to
be implemented simultaneously. In fact, changes in rules and mindsets often follow from and elicit one another. The following stories demonstrates how changes in rules can lead to changes in mindset, or conversely, how new mindsets can lead to new rules. In this story, the change plan is competition. The path to change begins with new rules, in this case constituted by contracts and gainsharing. The rules inspire the new mindset of precision in budgeting and spending. The resulting work practices-- the diligence and daily search for less expensive ways of operating-- allow them to be “smarter with the way we use our money… and … to provide the best services at the lowest cost.”

So, I think before was a pretty typical municipal operating department culture in terms of doing things the way we’ve done them for many years... believing that public health was important and that sometimes the budget as a scramble for resources, believing that public health was important and that sometimes the budget was only a guideline. [The budget] wasn’t so much as a stepping stone type of document. We weren’t nearly as precise in budgeting and/or looking at our operation, which I think is pretty typical. But now that we have a contract we’re a lot more precise in what we do and why we do it and how much it costs to do it. Even performance has become more important. When you have a safety goal...in our case a permit compliance goal, it used to be if the state hasn’t fined me, we’re doing a good job. Now it’s really important. If you have one safety violation you don’t get the gain sharing. You don’t meet it, so there are some very precise performance expectations that you have to try to meet. There’s more precision in what we do.

Some groups it’s not appropriate because there aren’t private sector competitors, but the goal is to have people thinking, even though they’re not in competition they need to be thinking in that cultural way. And that is: we have to be more precise. We have to be looking at ways to be smarter with the way we use our money. And that we have to always have to be trying to provide the best services at the lowest cost. And it’s that daily looking at what you do and seeing if there’s better ways to do it and/or less expensive ways that is really the cultural change that has been driven by competition. (BE #8)

Once again we provide the syllogisms related to this story to show how they distill the narrator's argument about the organizational change to competitive rules and mindsets. As you can see, he traces the path from the rule change to the consequent
mindset change, and links those to the ultimate achievement of better work.

- Contracts make people precise. We have a contract. Our employees are more precise.

- Gain sharing increases the expectation of precise performance. We have gain sharing. Therefore we have increased the expectation of precise performance.

- Precision makes people work better and smarter. We are precise. Our employees work better and smarter.

Contracts, as the rule, make people more precise, which in turn leads to changes in daily work. In this story the narrator makes the argument that now, because they have competition, the employees work better and smarter. The storyteller explicitly sums up (in reverse order) the path from rule to mindset to changes in work when he states “And it’s that daily looking at what you do and seeing if there’s better ways to do it and/or less expensive ways that is really the cultural change that has been driven by competition.” In this way, the rules related to competition inspired changes in culture, or what we identify as mindset.

Competition is not, of course, the only kind of change that our storytellers talked about. Take for instance, the following simple story about a change in office location. The rule that brought workers from different departments together results in a change in how they understand their jobs, and, through this, an improvement in work:

[Now] there’s about 20 of us who are on this floor from all those offices I talked about earlier: ... Basically Building Inspection, Zoning Enforcement, Planning, Engineering, Storm Water Management, Traffic Safety, Water Utilities and so we come at development from different perspectives. There’s a certain enriching opportunity here. We can learn each other’s job a little better, and I think do a better job in the eyes of the developer just because we understand each other’s perspective a little better. (SC #3)

This story highlights what we found throughout many stories. The new rule is a
change in where bodies are located: there are “20 of us … on this floor.” This rule is
different than the old way of doing work where before each of the different departments
worked separately from each other in isolated sections of the building and in different
buildings. The mindset is that “we understand each other’s perspective a little better.”
Thus, change in where work takes place-- which was generated from a plan to enable
citizens "one-stop shopping" access to city workers-- produced a change in how people
think about their work and, thus, in how work is accomplished. The storyteller states, “I
think [we] do a better job in the eyes of the developer.” This statement represents a
change in the way work is accomplished that started when a new rule was enacted and
came to fruition when that rule enactment was joined by a new understanding about the
work.

The relationship between these types of enactment can also proceed from mindset
to rule. Take, for instance, the following story in which controversy over a new union
contract is resolved:

...and I think the actually signing of the contract was a direct result of cultural
transformation as well. There were some issues that held the negotiation up for a
long period, almost a year before it was actually resolved, and at the visioning
process event in October, one of my friends... stood up and said, “Now
everybody’s huggy-feely, and we’re all feeling good about each other...and our
principles have been expounded upon, everybody feels as though we’re part of
this team, why don’t K and CB go in the backroom and resolve this unresolved
contract that hangs over everyone?” And I’ll be darned if K and CB didn’t go
into a separate room for a few moments, come back out and K announced that
what he and CB had agreed upon was to sit down in good faith based on what we
had experienced so far in cultural transformation and resolve it. And within two
or three weeks after that we had our contract. I really do believe that it
had...maybe not the defining or ultimate reason behind getting the contract
signed, but it certainly didn’t hurt. The more we communicate, the more you
allow yourself the openness to exchange ideas, the better the process. That’s just
the nature of it. (PA #9)

This is a story about how a change in mindset made it possible to get a good
contract signed between the union and the city. As a result of a new understanding about relations among members of the organization, the city manager and the union president were able to sit down and negotiate issues that had been pending for nearly a year. The story ends with a moral: a change in mindset ("the more you allow yourself the openness to exchange ideas") leads to a change in rules ("the better the process"). This process in turn leads to new actions such as sitting down in good faith that embody the original goals of the "cultural transformation" change plan, like improved teamwork and communication practices.

Fourth Insight: The Change Process Is Generative

The 4th insight provided by our storytellers relates to the generative quality of the change process. As mentioned earlier, the movement from plans to changes in the way work is accomplished is a never-ending cycle. This cycle includes both the evaluation of change as satisfying or unsatisfying and the relevance of this evaluation to defining the meaning of the change plan. Many different dynamics are possible. Many of our stories illustrated that dissatisfaction can help those trying to enact change to realize that either mindset or rule change is missing. And, as illustrated by the story about unsatisfying empowerment that we presented early in the paper, dissatisfaction can result in the belief that what is happening here is not really empowerment at all, hence that the change plan is essentially a sham.

Satisfying change has a different generative potential. The following, relatively lengthy story demonstrates how practices generated by change plans, in turn generate new change plans. We can divide the story into three sections, each with a distinct plan for change. First, the storyteller started with the idea or change plan related to
competition and the goal of being successful. He implemented this plan through a practice of respectful communication. Implementing respectful communication involves changing rules about communicating by instituting focus groups and meeting with every employee with a mindset about how to communicate, “talk to me like I’m a human being.” The result was another plan - the restructuring of work roles and new training – which was implemented through the practice of teamwork. Teamwork, as we have seen earlier, is another practice that requires the combination of rules and mindset. This teamwork approach resulted in specific actions such as sitting down with the person who buys equipment and writing specifications. Again, the result was a new idea or plan – the storyteller refers to it as “something very revolutionary for public sector” -- involving gainsharing. As the story ends, the storyteller is talking about the development of gainsharing practices and specific actions that will be a part of translating this new plan into a new way of doing the work.

....let me share this story with you. We were getting ready to start talking about competition. ... I started with focus groups. I met with every employee at 6:30 in the morning... and here was the universal question I asked all the employees: "Here’s where we are at, tell us what we need to be doing, what do we need to change to be successful?" ... Basically they felt that, number one, it was a very universal issue: respect. How do you talk to me? Talk to me like I’m a human being... And then secondly, I don’t need you to follow me around all day. Out of that I reduced my supervisors, too. It started from the employees saying "here is a guy in a pick-up truck and all he’s doing is following me around." That’s how I started my training...saying we need to be training supervisors for another role. Surely it’s not to follow collection vehicles around in pick-up trucks all day. That’s when we started talking about the team concept and do we truly need a work force of this size. Eighteen supervisors to drive a truck around or do we truly need 6 or 7 supervisors to act as coaches and support mechanisms? ... [Another] major issue was that we drive equipment everyday, but nobody ever asked us what kind of trucks. So we started having sessions where they could tell us. What works well what doesn’t work well with the equipment we are buying? Out of that we sat down with the equipment person and started saying "here are the do’s and the don’ts. Let’s write equipment specifications based upon what the employees have told us as much as possible."... Then we went to something very revolutionary for public sector. We went to gain
sharing. This is the monetary side... We basically started saying "here is what our per unit cost is, this is our benchmark cost. Any dollar that you save under that, that money won’t go back to the general fund, that money stays in the department. 25% up to your gross salary will go back to you, and the other portion will go toward technology to support what you’re trying to do..." That makes a difference. (PE #7)

This story highlights what many of the stories revealed. The plan is different from changing the way work is accomplished. The plan not only does not specify actions, but also can generate a variety of rule and mindset enactments that no one foresaw. It is, in fact, the sum of these enactments that give meaning to the plan. In this story, the storyteller demonstrates the nonlinear and generative nature of practice. When change plans are initiated and are enacted by employees they spark new ideas, actions, and practices. The storyteller provides an example of how initiating the single idea of competition, led to other ideas of restructuring, to an emphasis on respect, to teamwork, to gain sharing. While gain sharing was not the initial plan of change, it is an important part of changing the way work is accomplished. As previous stories indicated, gain sharing helped employees enact a new mindset about their work and added an important element to the ideas of respectful communication and teamwork that had already been enacted.

The change plan started out as competition. Competition could mean many things. At the time this story was told, the meaning of the change plan included more respectful communication, changed organizational roles, a new training program, more rational equipment purchases and gain sharing. At each step, the storyteller expresses satisfaction and moves on to yet another action that defines what competition is. He concludes the story with his overall assessment of satisfaction – that makes a difference.
DISCUSSION

The central insight of our research involves the process of generating meaning for change plans that operates through the integration of organizational and individual level change in a reciprocal and generative relationship. Analyzing the stories told by individuals within two U.S. city administrations about how they perceived initiated plans for change and the subsequent changes (or lack of change) they saw in their work, we discovered a set of relationships that influence the evaluation of change plans and affect the meaning that change plans acquire. Key to these relationships is the idea that organizational changes are accomplished through a combination of changes to both individual mindsets and organizational rules. One kind of change, either mindset or rule, can inspire the other, but our stories indicate that the presence of both is important, if not essential, to producing change that is satisfying. In addition, we acknowledge the continual, interwoven nature of change that, while easier to conceptualize as a set of discrete stages, is more reasonably understood as a dynamic and unpredictable loop (Orlikowski 1996, Tsoukas and Chia 2002).

Change narratives and change stories

Our stories of satisfying change consistently portray a picture of either changes in rules followed by changes in mindset or the reverse. The contrast between starting with changes in organizational rules and starting with changes in individual mindsets that the research was designed to emphasize turned out to be surprisingly insignificant. The larger narratives of change in both cities involved the importance of the significant
focusing events, which in Charlotte related to changes in organizational rules and in Grand Rapids related to changes in individual mindsets. The specific stories that illustrate examples of change, however, do not portray the same message. Neither the order of presentation nor the emphasis placed on the different aspects of change present a pattern of rule or mindset change being primary.

One way of understanding the difference between the message of the larger narrative and the patterns in the smaller stories is that the former are about how to start change and the latter are about how to sustain change. Starting change can be, and perhaps from a narrative and rhetorical perspective must be, clearly defined (Zbaracki, 1998). The narrative serves as a touchstone that fuels the momentum of change (Ford and Ford, 1995). Sustaining change, however, involves the day-to-day development of new ways of working. The abstractions of the grand narrative may be less useful in sustaining change than in the process of starting it. These stories instead emphasize the messy, interactive and improvisational quality of day-to-day change. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the stories of specific examples of change do not display the same pattern as the larger change narratives.

These differences between the way starting change and sustaining change are narratively portrayed may be part of the explanation for the persistence of the debate about whether change is revolutionary or evolutionary, punctuated or incremental, continuous or episodic (Weick and Quinn, 1999; Gersick, 1991; Tsoukas and Chia, 2002). Different ways of doing research and different research questions could easily emphasize one level of narrative over another, and thereby emphasize starting change over sustaining change.
The need for changes in both rules and mindset helps explain why, in Kanter’s (1983) terminology, long marches are often necessary even when bold strokes are successfully undertaken. The bold strokes start the change and are probably focused on making a dramatic difference in either organizational rules or individual mindsets. While satisfying change may emerge at that point because the corresponding change in individual mindsets or in organizational rules had already taken place, it is much more likely that the corresponding change will take place afterward. The emergence of the corresponding change may take time both because it may not be clear what the corresponding change is and because the corresponding change may be difficult to bring about.

Further development of the relationship between rule enactment and mindset enactment is an area for future research. How and under what conditions does rule enactment encourage mindset enactment and vice versa? Our stories often suggest implicit theories about the relationships. In the stories about gain-sharing, changes in rules motivate people to think differently. In other stories, changes in rules remove obstacles and enable people to act differently. Changes in mindset are sometimes portrayed as promoting changes in rules through persuasion (people literally convince those in a position to change the rules that this is the right thing to do) or as an act of follow-through as in the case of the contract negotiation story. Exploring the mechanisms that relate rule and mindset enactment would provide an even better understanding of how change happens in organizations.

Another area for future research involves the role of satisfaction in sustaining change. Many of our stories suggest that satisfying change is not only an indicator but
also a generator of sustained change. And yet both tradition and scholarship suggests that dissatisfaction is a more likely motivator of change. It would be useful to explore the relation between satisfaction and the generation of new possibilities. Under what conditions does satisfaction produce an inclination to continue changing?

**Implications for practice**

How can organizational participants interested in bringing about change encourage the movement toward satisfying change rather than stifled, coerced or no change? Our insights suggest that shifting attention away from change plans to changes in action is critical for understanding how meaning is developed by organizational actors. Simply understanding the importance of both rules and mindset and the potential for interaction between them is helpful. Rule changes need to be accompanied or followed by efforts to help people understand why the changes are being made and how the rule changes affect their ability to do the work they value. Mindset changes need to be accompanied or followed by changes in the rules and resources that enable people to do the work the mindset encourages them to imagine. Furthermore, when mindsets change they point to the rules that need to change and when rules change they point to the mindsets that need to change. From this perspective, issues that arise in the course of changing are not obstacles to change but sustenance for the change process.

**CONCLUSION**

Theoretically informed by practiced-based perspectives of organizational change, this paper focuses on the relationship between action and change plans in the context of
two city administrations. We found that organizational actors identify two kinds of meanings for change plans. Stories told by organizational participants enabled us to identify both definitional and evaluative meanings of change plans. Evaluative meanings were associated with the congruence or lack of congruence of two kinds of actions, those that indicate change in organizational rule and resources and those that indicate change in individual understandings or mindsets. Change plans identified as satisfying combine change at the individual and organizational levels to create a new way of accomplishing work. The new way of accomplishing work defines the content of the change plan. Change plans identified as unsatisfying fail to create new ways of doing work and the lack of new ways of doing work means that the definitional content of the change plan is less full. Thus, the definitional and evaluative understandings are interrelated in a dynamic, reciprocal and generative relationship.

Our initial interpretation led us to anticipate that changes in action would have distinctive characteristics depending on the change plans initiated by each city administration. Because Grand Rapids storytellers talked about change in terms of "cultural transformation," we thought that they would locate important change actions in mindset. Likewise, we expected that Charlotte storytellers would talk about change actions as significantly located within rules. Instead we found that neither changing rules nor changing mindset was a "better" or more successful approach, but that the combination of the two kinds of changes in action was key in changing the way work is accomplished. We learned that the means for changing did not reside in the particular change plans, but relied more on the kinds of meaning made by organizational actors.

Our analysis suggests that the kind of change plan that results in satisfying change
is facilitated by a congruence of organizational structures (consisting of rules and resources) and individual mindsets. Having either one without the other or having neither produces unsatisfying change. From the organizational actor’s perspective unsatisfying change encompasses attempts at changing work practices that are coerced or stifled or lead to no change. However, the analysis also points out that this insight does not imply that changes must be simultaneously enacted in both organizational rules and individual mindsets. Many stories in our analysis demonstrated how changes in either organizational rules or individual mindsets promoted change in the other, at which point, the change became satisfying. Change processes involve enacting rules and mindsets that give meaning to change plans. The particular combination of actions at any point in time both constructs and demonstrates the meaning of the change plan. As one of our storytellers relates it:

“The good news of that top-down reorganization is that bringing it to life required a change in corporate culture, if you will. So, it got framed and imposed but then it came to life inside out” (Manager, Charlotte, NC).
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