

**Classic Theories – Contemporary Applications:
a comparative study of the implementation of innovation
in Canadian and Chinese Public Sector environments**

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Abstract

In a classic article reviewing the field of planned change, Chin and Benne (1984) outlined three meta-approaches to the implementation of change in social and organizational contexts. These meta-theories of change – Rational-Empirical, Normative-Reeducative, and Power-Coercive – summarized the field of then-existing knowledge related to innovation at a systems level. Chin and Benne’s resulting framework summarized much of the practice in change management carried out to date and provided a framework for planning of change to be implemented over the next several decades. Research with a Public Sector focus carried out more recently (Popovich, 1998; Pozner and Rothstein, 1994) confirms that the theoretical orientations outlined in 1984 continue to be applied to the practice of innovation among modern public sector managers.

This study outlines the relative popularity of each of the three meta-strategies within public sector environments within Canadian and Chinese Public Sector environments. Research interviews and literature indicate that there are significant differences, driven by culture and experience with change itself, across these two environments. Within the framework provided by Chin and Benne, current practice in a Canadian environment tends to favour a combination of Normative-Reeducative and Rational-Empirical change strategies while Chinese change practice tends to focus on a Power-Coercive approach backed up by a Rational-Empirical strategy.

Reviews of case studies of change efforts carried out in Canada indicate a movement, in some cases at the level of intent but increasingly in practice, toward change strategies reflective of Normative-Reeducative thinking. Innovative attempts to increase employee and stakeholder participation in change strategy development are key in this trend. In contrast, analysis of reveal that, while a Power-Coercive strategy is both culturally sanctioned and supported, a meta-strategy different from the three nominated in Chin and Benne’s framework dominates change practice. Study findings indicate that attempts at change efforts are generally effective to the extent that they are introduced by power figures, but driven through *Relationship* as a key change strategy. The narratives analyzed suggest that in China, relationship is a necessary prerequisite to beginning and reinforcing effective change processes. The article explores the implication of this alternative strategy for the introduction of innovation in a public sector environment. Attention is drawn to the significance of a stakeholder orientation to governance as an underlying value in the initiation of dialogue “within relationship” as an innovative change strategy.

An Overview of Strategies for Planned Change in Human Systems

The problem with any discussion of change, regardless of the sector in which it is applied, is that change occurs in many forms. The multiple and varied approaches that managers take to change implementation make comparison of change processes complex. For the purposes of this article, the focus of analysis will be limited to those types of change falling into the category called “planned change” (Argyris, 1970; Bennis, Benne, and Chin, 1984). In such initiatives, the motivation to bring about the change is conscious and deliberate, at least by those directing the change process itself, as opposed to reactive. Planned change also distinguishes itself by its focus on the development of *broad systemic plans* to address the dynamics of the change initiative. Other forms of change tend to focus on individual *elements of the system* while ignoring the connection between those elements across the change system. This article focuses on planned change in contrast to more opportunistic change processes since the assumptions and intrinsic thinking of the leaders of such efforts can more easily be identified and studied. It is the identification and analysis of patterns in the thinking of such leaders that is the focus of this article.

General Strategies of Change

Change as an organizational process has been studied within a behavioral science context for well over 50 years. Some of the early Western researchers in this area (including Kurt Lewin, Ron Lippitt, Warren Bennis, Kenneth Benne, and Robert Chin) focused their early research on identifying the range of approaches used to guide and frame change efforts. In 1984, Chin and Benne authored an article summarizing what they saw as an overall framework cataloguing the then-utilized approaches to change management. The framework has remained an often cited guide to change practice and a useful tool for analysis of potential approaches to change strategy development.

Within the Chin and Benne framework, the broad area of change management is divided into three “general strategies”: 1) Rational-Empirical; 2) Normative-Reeducative; and 3) Power-Coercive. Each of these meta-strategies approaches the planning and implementation of change from different philosophical and practice-based sets of assumptions.

Empirical-Rational Strategy

The initial underpinnings of an approach to change are based on the assumptions of the initiator concerning the nature of the individuals or system to be changed. Chin and Benne’s first meta-strategy builds on the fundamental assumption that people are rational. The implication is that, once presented with information that demonstrates that a particular change is in their self-interests, they will accept the change as a means of achieving that interest. In its implementation, this strategy works as follows: a change is

put forward by an individual or group who believes that what they are proposing is desirable and in keeping with the self interests of the group that will have to change. In the process of putting forward the change proposal, the proposer(s) rationally justify the change, pointing out those elements linking it to the interests of the group and showing how both the group and the individuals will benefit from the change. The underlying assumption of this approach is that if the arguments and the rational data are presented in an effective manner, the group will support the change because rationally it supports their self-interests.

The key component of the Rational-Empirical approach to change is information. Especially in the Western world, progress has been largely measured by the movement, through the development of a strong and universal educational system, from a state of

| Common Assumptions of a Rational-Empirical Approach to Change |
|---|
| 1. People are rational and driven primarily by self interest. |
| 2. If the right information is put forward in an engaging and convincing manner, people will see the wisdom of the change and act in support of the proposal. |
| 3. Information should be gathered by “expert” professionals, to ensure that it is accurate and reflects modern methodological protocols. |
| 4. Transfer of information, once gathered, is primarily a one-way process. Senior representatives of the system (or their expert representatives) communicate “the facts” and help recipients understand. |
| 5. Dialogue is in service of “understanding”, not redefining or changing the facts as discovered and promoted by the experts. |

“ignorance” among the population to one where logic, information, and knowledge are prized as key underlying contributors to decision-making. In such an environment, basic research, the development of strategy based on the results of data gathering and analysis, and the promotion on change based on fact-based knowledge is highly valued and promoted as a “normal” approach to rationalizing change directions. In a Rational-Empirical environment, the perceived value of the information-base to change strategy is so strong in some cases that, without the support

of overwhelming data supporting the case for change, many intuitively obvious change needs cannot be effectively promoted. The “case” supporting them is not sufficiently strong.

Although the Rational-Empirical approach to change focuses on the use of information as a primary change motivator, the overall methodology uses a variety of sub-strategies to move change forward. Included in those originally identified by Chin and Benne were basic research and the dissemination of knowledge (through such mechanisms as academic and popular journals and presentations), selection and promotion of personnel based on a consistent knowledge base, and the use of systems analysts as generators of information about organizational dynamics. A more recently documented strategy (Burdus and Miles: 2000) focuses on the use of technology (Internet and IT networks) as information generators and transmission strategies. The increased ability of managers to

ensure that members of their organizations have access to new information as it becomes available provides a new and immediate mechanism supporting change. These technological mechanisms support the basic tenet of the Rational-Empirical approach to change that, with sufficient information, system members will support changes that are logical in nature.

Normative-Reeducative Strategy

A second meta-strategy focuses on *Normative-Reeducative* approaches to change. This typology differs markedly from the Rational-Empirical approach outlined above. It is based on the premise that individuals (and human systems) are necessarily *active* in their search for need satisfaction and self-fulfillment and that change is largely values-based as opposed to rational in nature. Change is motivated, according to this approach, when the individuals identify some level of dissatisfaction with the *status quo* based on fundamental value clashes. The key task of those who follow this approach to change is not to find the right information to guide a rational change process but to find a proper and effective relationship between the values of the system (and its members) and the values of the organizational environment. The search is guided by active experimentation and the direct involvement of as many members of the system as possible as a primary methodology to the development of the change strategy.

A primary assumption of this approach is that intelligence is “social” rather than rational. Protagonists hold that only through intense interaction between the players in the system can the optimal change strategy be discovered, developed, and adopted with commitment. Successful change strategy must take into consideration the surrounding culture of the environment. Such considerations include attention to the broader system, including socially determined meanings and norms and the personal where internalized meanings, habits, and values of the members dominate.

Common Assumptions of a Normative-Reeducative Approach to Change

1. Involvement of the members of the change system in working out programs of change under their own direction.
2. Definition of the change problem includes the probability that shifts in attitudes, values, norms, and relationships between players in the system and between the system and its external environment may be required.
3. Relationship of management and the members of the system is one of mutual collaborators in the development of the final strategy and not one of power dominance by any one segment of the system.
4. Deeper level assumptions and dynamics of the system (power, privilege, and personality) are examined as part of the change process.
5. A sub-goal of the change process is to improve the overall skills of the system to direct its own change processes in the future. The change process itself should model the desired behavioral changes being pursued.

Such elements frequently conflict with the rational data generated by fact-based research. Change as defined by this approach, therefore, extends beyond the development of common understandings that people have at a rational level to include the deeper personal meanings that each carries with them at the level of habits and values. At the organizational level, changes driven by the Normative-Reeducative approach focus on alterations in how organizations define the Normative or “right” way to structure relationships, roles, and the personal meanings that individuals accept about human systems and their missions in the world. Typical focuses of change include improving overall organizational problem-solving, personal growth and development of system members, either as individuals or as part of cadres within the system (such as executive or middle management groups), and more recently, redesign or restructuring of organizational systems to maximize member participation and involvement as noted in Weisbord (1991) and Emery (1999).

In the world of Normative-Reeducative change, arrival at common definitions of organizational values and norms is generally the preliminary step to change efforts. The process is driven by intense and usually personal exploration on the part of organizational members of deeper level assumptions and beliefs, resulting in personal and organizational clarification of organizational norms through active discussion, interaction, and exploration. This contrasts with the Rational-Empirical approach where the change process represents an intellectual engagement with data and information supportive of a new vision of how the system should operate. The commitment to change through a Rational-Empirical approach is a commitment to what is most logical and effective, even if the rational outcome contradicts some of the deeply held values of the organization’s members. As can be appreciated, changes of a Normative-Reeducative kind generally take longer to carry out. Once initiated, however, and established in a social system, their effects tend to be much more deeply felt over a longer period of time. Recent research covering North America, Europe, and Australia (Emery, 1999) indicates that, where members of a system feel that they can have a direct impact on the way the system operates, broad indicators of organization effectiveness, including output and employee morale, tend to be positively affected.

Power-Coercive Approaches to Change

Elements of power can be found in all approaches to change. In the Rational-Empirical approach, power is based in the information or knowledge that is used as a prime mover of the change. In this approach, those who possess the knowledge hold power in the system. Judicious use of information represents a clear application of power within systems change driven by knowledge. In Normative-reeducating change, the underlying philosophy of change focuses on the development of a *personal sense of power* and the sharing of *organizational power* through the active involvement of system members in problem definition and solution generation.

The Power-Coercive strategy emphasizes a different approach and different elements of the power process. In general, this approach to change emphasizes the use of political and economic sanctions as the principle strategy to bringing about change, although the use of “moral” power also historically forms a key element of the strategy (Benne and Chin, 1984).

Political / Positional Power as a Change Strategy

Political or positional power involves the ability to create policies, directions, laws and other legal agreements that bring with them legitimate sanctions for non-compliance. Threat of sanction has the impact of increasing the willingness of system members to follow the directions of those who hold the power and engage in the change that they mandate. In addition to the economic and other sanctions that tend to be associated with this approach to change, many individuals are influenced by deeply held cultural beliefs concerning the legitimacy of senior members of the hierarchy to give direction to members of the systems for which they hold responsibility. The aura of legitimacy of the power source is sufficient, in these cases, to reduce resistance to imposed change. In such cases, a Power-Coercive way of making decision is accepted as the nature of the way the system operates.

Economic Power as a Change Strategy

The use of economic sanctions represents a logical extension of political power. Under a political power scenario in the broader social context, sanctions generally focus on jail and other personal liberty sanctions. Under the economic power strategy for change, the rewards (and sanctions) focus on the provision (or withholding) of financial incentives. Organizations can differentially reward members for their active implementation of new methods of management or new approaches to dealing with issues. Governments can dole out (or withhold) funding from organizations in return for their willingness to comply with new policy directions. This last example represents a combination of political power (the right to set policy directions) and economic power (the ability to fund the new directions and to withdraw funding from other practices now seen as outmoded).

Common Assumptions of a Power-Coercive Approach to Change

1. Power is legitimate and carries rights with it – people should listen to those who hold power.
2. Those with power have the responsibility to give direction to others in the system. It is not significant that those others do not accept the direction that they are receiving as appropriate or correct.
3. Those who hold power have the right to punish those who do not follow their directions.
4. The best interests of the organization are served naturally by following the directions of those who are more senior in the hierarchy – they naturally, or through dint of their experience, know what is best.

Specific strategies of Power-Coercive Change range from overthrow of political regimes through non-violence, the changing of organizational management through stakeholder pressure and the “power of the Annual Meeting”, the use of public policy and legislation to force organizational change, and the use of “moral suasion” to embarrass management into appropriate action. Classic examples of such strategies would include Ghandi’s efforts to overthrow the British in India, Saul Alinsky’s radical work in the Chicago ghettos and Lee Iacocca’s management approach at Chrysler. All used different applications of power strategies to force change – and all were effective in affecting the systems they were working with.

All of the above meta-strategies (Rational-Emperical, Normative-Reeducative, and Power-Coercive) represent approaches to bringing about change in human systems. While few change processes draw exclusively from one of the three, most base their approaches in one of the three camps and use tactics from the other two to initiate change efforts or propel them along at significant moments. When viewed through the lens of these three frameworks, patterns can be seen in the preferred and predominant approaches to change chosen by organizational systems around the world. This is particularly true in public sector organizations where expectations of transparency and emerging demands for greater stakeholder impact on decision-making processes have become increasingly strident (Paquet, 2000; Gill, 2000). The remainder of this study outlines and compares patterns of change processes, broken down along Chin and Benne’s change frameworks as identified through case study and participant interviews in Canadian public organizations and Chinese State Owner Enterprises.

Methodology and Research Design

Two primary approaches were taken to generate data concerning preferred approaches to implementing change in the target environments. The first was a review of case study literature focused on change management initiatives. Twenty two cases related to change within a Canadian public sector environment were identified and reviewed from the perspective of the Chin and Benne framework Results of the analysis of these cases are presented in Table 1. Due to difficulties in identifying similar written cases of public sector change initiatives in a Chinese environment, individual managers from a number of State Enterprises in China were asked to write descriptive narratives concerning their experiences with change initiatives that they had experienced. These were subsequently translated and analyzed thematically to identify patterns in managerial preferences related to change practice. Patterns identified have been compared and contrasted to those noted in the Canadian cases. Summary finding related to these narrative descriptions is summarized in Table 2.

Table 1
Change Strategy Preferences – Canadian Public Sector Environment

| Change Strategy Focus | Number of References* | Sub-Strategies Highlighted |
|------------------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Rational-Empirical | 9 24 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ?? Internal surveys ?? Benchmarking of other agencies (by senior management) ?? Use of expert consultants ?? Internal efficiency analysis and reporting ?? Executive briefing sessions ?? Informational “townhall” meetings |
| Normative-Reeducative | 8 18 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ?? Problem-solving / decision-making training for all staff ?? Participative redesign of workplace ?? Data gathering about system by employees ?? Use of external facilitators to support broad-based problem-solving sessions ?? Organizational simulations to stimulate change-related discussions ?? “Vertical-slice” benchmarking visits |
| Power-Coercive | 5 7 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ?? Explicit direction from boss ?? Threats to job security ?? Promotion to supporters; none for laggards ?? Educational opportunities for supporters |

Note: numbers in bold represent *primary* change strategy. Regular scripted numbers represent the use of *secondary or supporting* change strategies

Analysis of Table 1 indicates a slight preference for the Normative-Reeducative change strategy over the Rational-Empirical processes, although the use of information as a primary and strong backup strategy is well noted in the cases reviewed. The shift toward involvement of employees and managers in the gathering and analysis of data was noted in the case summaries as powerful in moving the cultures toward more of a sense of collaboration. This contrasts with the predominant use of expert consultants and technical advisors to carry out this task in the past (Halal, 2001).

For many (Pozner and Rothstein:1994, and Popovich: 1998) the more interesting shift has been the movement away from overt Power-Coercive strategies – such as the directive accompanied by threats – toward a more inclusive approach to change. Large-scale public sector changes in Canada have traditionally been accomplished primarily through application of power-based approaches. Although these have been overtly supported through application of sub-strategies associated with the other meta-strategies, the application of hierarchical power has represented a favored strategy for short term movement. Programs affecting the public sector, such as employment equity or bilingualism, represent excellent examples of the application of a power-based approach. Although reporting of Power-Coercive change may be underreported due to a growing social stigma associated with the application of power in this manner, the cases reviewed in association with this research appears to indicate growing support for – and skill in the use of – collaborative and participative approaches to change management.

A Sample Case of Public Sector Change in Canada: The Canadian Transportation Agency

The Canadian Transportation Agency (Agency) is a quasi-judicial tribunal, which is mandated to oversee federally regulated transportation. It is an organization that has undergone substantial change over the past decade. The move towards a more de-regulated transportation system coincided with government wide downsizing and left the organization fundamentally changed. The elimination of various regulations and programs left the organization with half of its staff and less than one-tenth of its budget.

Despite these significant organizational changes, the way in which the Agency discharged its primary function – resolving transportation disputes – did not change. They followed the traditional judicial route requiring parties to submit oral or written argument, analysis by Agency staff and Members of the tribunal and a written decision on the matter. In the 1996-97 fiscal year, the Agency issued over 2000 decisions and licenses with a total of 356 staff. While the sheer volume of cases put significant pressure on the employees and systems within the organization, the fact that legislation required that all matters before the tribunal be completed within 120 days created a system that was untenable in the long run.

The organizational change imposed by government wide downsizing, the pressures that the system was under and the new direction of a deregulated transportation system

created service concerns. In 1998, the Agency hired a research firm to survey clients in the rail transportation sector to generate information on its systems and administration of its enabling legislation. The generation of valid information was a critical first step in the change process as it enabled the Agency to accurately identify issues and elements in its systems and processes that needed to be addressed.

The results of this information gathering exercise indicated that clients of the Agency thought that the decision-making process was overly time consuming and complex. The results of the survey were, although not unexpected, surprising. The assumption within the organization was that if there was any dissatisfaction with the Agency it was because resources were spread too thin and quality might have been an inadvertent victim of restructuring. The findings of the research, however, indicated that the quality of the work remained high; it was the process of dispute resolution that was causing dissatisfaction. The existence of this information caused cognitive dissonance in specific individuals within the organization – who would go on to be the leading agents of change at the Agency.

These change agents began a change process that started with more information gathering. The first step in that process was gathering even more information on best practices of dispute resolution in various organizations. It is important to note that this was conducted by individuals at all levels of the organization, from junior staff to senior management. This occurred precisely because the survey results were shared throughout the organization. It was not only senior managers who were privy to this information, and as a result a more powerful coalition for change was established. Information sharing also precluded a power-based approach to changing existing systems and required the Agency adopt a more participative model.

This model was essentially a hybrid between the empirical and Normative models described by Chin and Benne. The benchmarking exercise and the survey results pointed the Agency towards a more collaborative dispute resolution model by using interest-based mediation as its primary tool. While the qualitative and quantitative results clearly indicated that mediation would be an ideal complement to existing processes and would alleviate the pressures on the system and address the performance gaps identified by clients of the Agency, the challenge for the organization was how to implement and integrate this new process.

The integration of new systems is a difficult task, as it requires acceptance and commitment on the part of individuals within the organization. The strategy for change adoption is dependent on the type of change that is to be implemented. In order for a new dispute resolution process to be integrated, a new approach had to be developed as acceptance via empirical justification had reached its limit. There were staff who remained unconvinced that mediation would work, and others who viewed the process as a threat to their existing work. Some believed that if disputes were mediated in increasing numbers, their role in the traditional judicial process would become redundant. Many of these feelings were a legacy of the recent downsizing of the organization.

The Agency essentially had two options: it could implement a new system and require it to be used, or it could adopt an approach whereby the organization would voluntarily experiment with the adoption of mediation as an alternative dispute resolution process. As mediation is essentially a collaborative process, the Agency recognized that the way in which it integrated this process had to be consistent with a collaborative philosophy. Management's belief was that changes that require participation or collaboration will not be effective if the way in which they are implemented does not reflect the desired process results. In order to be consistent with the collaborative approach, the Agency pursued a Normative-Reeducative change process to implement mediation in one of its three branches.

With a view to highlighting the positive impacts of the new approach and having individuals experience some sense of cognitive dissonance between their current beliefs and the obvious positive results of the new methods, the Agency implemented a mediator training program which was open to all employees of the Agency. Focus of this approach was on two objectives. The first was that staff accustomed to working through a traditional resolution process would be able to function as a mediator. The intent of providing skills to individuals was to overcome resistance to change that arose out of personal concerns for job security. The second, and probably more important objective was to challenge what Chin and Benne refer to as the "habits and values" as well as the "institutionalized roles, relationships, and cognitive / perceptual orientations" of individuals. Staff who took part in these training exercises had their existing beliefs about conflict resolution and the role of the Agency challenged. They were able to experience the advantages of mediation by participating, conducting and observing the new processes in action. At the end of the training exercises, the response towards mediation was drastically different from the initial perceptions held by individuals.

What this change approach was able to achieve was the ability to create a powerful and influential group of employees who not only had a rational understanding of the benefits of mediation, but who were also now uncomfortable with the status quo. The change in the outlook of these individuals drastically reduced the resistance to change within the branch where mediation was being used. The normative awakening was so effective, that within one year mediation is in the process of being expanded into all areas of dispute resolution at the Agency.

The Chinese Experience:

Analysis of the Chinese approach to management of change in a public sector yields some significant differences in emphasis and basic approach. The quantitative data outlined in Table 2 indicates that the preferred Chinese approach is Power-Coercive. When the analysis of the data is limited to the three meta-approaches originally named by Chin and Benne, fifty four percent of the nominated primary orientations to change fell into this category. Statements concerning this basic orientation to change were so strong among some of the respondents that the choice of using Rational-Empirical or

Table 2
Change Strategy Preferences – Chinese State Enterprise Environment

| Change Strategy Focus | Number of References | Sub-Strategies Highlighted |
|------------------------------|----------------------|--|
| Rational-Empirical | 8 4 | ?? Education programs to instill common knowledge ?? Criticism (self and other) and suggestion ?? Provide information about the change at the critical moment of stress ?? Identify and apply modern principles ?? Show people the economic benefits of your plan ?? Analyze the situation and present the results |
| Normative-Reeducative | 4 2 | ?? Building common set of value references around which the change revolves ?? Expose people to opportunities to try new things ?? Set up opportunities for people to get frustrated – this encourages them to change ?? Engage people in thinking through and making the change. |
| Power-Coercive | 14 6 | ?? Creation of regulations to require the change ?? The organization (management) issues orders ?? Reward people for their correct performance through public recognition ?? Tell people about the change and do not allow for choice ?? Issue disciplinary regulations ?? Use Senior representative to discuss the change: their position will bring about the change ?? Use economic power to give gifts to get the change ?? As leader, make the decision and then be tough! ?? Reward people through bonus for the changes |

Normative-Reeducative approaches relatively less effective. One participant stated emphatically: Of the preferred mechanisms of power assertion, directives, edicts, and regulations were frequently nominated. This would be very much in keeping with the psychological and cultural experience of the Chinese people in which strict adherence to hierarchy and the directions emanating from those in authority is expected and valued as appropriate. Bond (1996) notes that such behavior is very much in keeping with the

norms of “filial piety”, in which loyalty and submission to superiors is the norm in a family setting. Hsu (1965) has long established that this dynamic can be generalized to cover “any consensually defined situation or superordination and subordination, such as that between teacher and student or between employer and employee.”

The above is not to say that the other meta-strategies to change are not utilized. In the narratives analyzed, thirty one percent of the respondents noted a primary orientation to Rational-Empirical approaches. Specific strategies associated with Chinese practice here included analysis of the situation with results presented to managers and employees alike, criticism as an approach to providing information related to preferred change in organizational practice, and education as a preferred process of increasing understanding of more effective methods for approaching organizational issues. This last process again builds on the Confucian assumption that the senior will educate the junior, providing education and direction as part of the superior’s role.

***Change In China
(view 1)***

“The only way to bring about change around here is to tell people what to do and punish them if they don’t obey. As managers we lose face if we are not strong and decisive!”

*Chinese Senior
Manager*

Finally, strategies of Normative reeducation, while not widely discussed, were nominated in fifteen percent of the narratives as the primary orientation of the change leader to bringing about a shift in organizational behavior or structure. A number of respondents referred to examples in which the change agent engineered experiences designed to generate cognitive dissonance along with the opportunity to discuss alternative approaches to the “problem situation”. IN another case, one respondent described a meeting session in which the manager structured an intense discussion of values and what was important for the company on the part of participants as an approach to jointly building a strategy of change with them.

Relationship: a New Meta Strategy

Throughout the responses to descriptions of change efforts, however, participants frequently and emphatically referred to actions that did not easily fit the three meta-strategies outlined above. This strategy was based in the process of building and using personal relationships as a key process of influencing and achieving change objectives. One participant framed this approach clearly when she indicated that “It was not the information or the power that determined whether change would happen or not. It was the quality and depth of the relationship between the manager and the others involved in the change. If the relationship was good, change would probably go ahead easily. Otherwise, the manager would have to fall back on his power – and the change would happen slowly.”

The range of individual strategies uncovered in the narratives was wide, encompassing a varied application of “relationship” as a strategic element in the change process. Most

***Change in China
(view 2)***

“The most important things are to banquet frequently [build relationships] and speak frankly.”

*Chinese Senior
Manager*

frequently nominated were strategies of building relationship through social engagements with the effect of building influence and a “circle of comfort within which changes could be discussed openly and freely” [participant data]. The intent of such discussions was to influence the parties in the direction of a preferred change from the perspective of the change agent while “understanding the situation of the employee” [participant data]. This latter represents a significant element of the spirit of the Relational strategy, since it leave open the possibility that the change, as envisioned by the manager, may be modified by new information and circumstances that the drivers of the change were not aware of. Within the circle of the relationship, the change becomes open to negotiation, with

optimal rational solutions giving way to satisfied operational ones. The key driver of the change becomes the relationship between those in the discussion – especially those that have been developed over time and through personal experiences involving some degree of joint hardship – and their commitment *to each other* as opposed to the solution itself.

These processes proved to be the dominant strategy of those nominated in the narratives analyzed from a quantitative perspective. When added to the total number of change incidents analyzed, the redefined framework yields the frequency distribution outlined in Table 3. Actual tactics associated with the strategy are outlined in Table 4.

Table 3

**Frequency Distribution of Change Strategies
(redefined Meta-Strategy Framework)**

| <i>Change Meta-Strategy</i> | <i>Primary Orientation</i> | <i>Secondary Orientation</i> |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Rational-Empirical | 8 | 4 |
| Normative-Reeducative | 4 | 2 |
| Power-Coercive | 14 | 6 |
| Relational | 16 | 4 |

Table 4

Relationship as a Change Strategy

| Change Strategy Focus | Number of References | Sub-Strategies Highlighted |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Relationship | <p>16</p> <p>4</p> | <p>?? Discussion of personal family situation</p> <p>?? Recreational activities together – builds relationship and common bonds</p> <p>?? Getting to know each other better – just this brings about change</p> <p>?? Encourage efforts to change through our close relationship and discussions</p> <p>?? Become close to the people and discuss the situation and possibilities</p> <p>?? Use close and personal relationship to convince people to do what you want done.</p> <p>?? Build good social relationships and use the spirit of relationship to discuss the change</p> <p>?? Always use middle people with relationship to discuss the change: its not the information that is important – it is the relationship</p> <p>?? Focus on the past good relationship.</p> |

Relevance of the Findings to Change in a Public Sector Environment

The perspectives and schools of thought within any particular context derive their distinctiveness and, ultimately, their effectiveness from their fit to the socio-cultural and political environment within which they exist. The “fit” is particularly important in environments, such as the Public Service, where agendas are multiple and frequently political in nature. Chin and Benne’s initial analysis of change strategies examined frameworks used to direct change within human systems from a utilitarian and pragmatic perspective. The initial framework, documented initially in 1976 and modified in 1984, focused on three guiding meta-elements of influence in the change process: information (“People are rational”), values (“People commit to self-determined ideals”) and power (“People are driven by fear.”) While this framework encompasses many of the change initiatives researched in their initial study – and frankly, nicely summarizes the dominant thinking today’s management cadre – it ignores an alternative, potentially powerful, and often neglected path to change in our Public Service environments in the West. The

concept of the development and use of “Relationship” as an alternative or additional meta-strategy for the promotion of change represents a potential avenue of exploration that, save the time required for the development of significantly powerful and meaningful relationships, could add tremendous impetus to innovation within our public institutions.

From a governance perspective, the preferences implied by this framework favour the stakeholder approach. Implicit in this philosophy of governance is a preference for collaboration across large bodies of individuals and groups who, through open dialogue, come to trust each other in their decision-making processes. Halal (2001) points out that, by viewing stakeholders as “partners who create economic and social value through ‘collaborative problem-solving’”, the development of a new model – the “collaborative enterprise” can be developed. While his focus is primarily on the private sector organization, he comments that the social responsibilities of business and the dynamics of decision-making around those responsibilities closely parallels the processes that are both necessary within and available to Public Sector organizations. Indeed, within Public Service organization in Canada, the process of public consultation and dialogue currently being used both internally and externally has the potential of pushing discussion beyond the mere exchange of information with the purpose of increasing understanding (Rational-Empirical strategy) to a more powerful form of mutual understanding and creative action.

This later can happen, however, only if the intent and strategy of the change managers is to move beyond dialogue at the level of *information* to dialogue focused on deep listening with empathy, the expression of hidden assumptions, the identification of common interests, and a search for conceptual breakthroughs (Isaacs, 1999). The limitations of our current frameworks of approaching change – outlined so long ago by Chin and Benne – are highlighted by this alternative approach to change management practice modeled by some – not all – managers in the Chinese Public Sector environment. Clearly efforts of senior managers to build relationships of trust with large numbers of employees and the public represents an enormous commitment of time and energy. The movement, through dialogue and openness to solutions alternate to those driven by power and expert information, also represents high risk in a risk-averse environment. The alternative, however, appears to be to commit the same time and energy to the creation of additional bureaucratic control mechanisms, legislation, and consultation processes designed more to sell than to listen, all of which have had questionable results as change mechanisms in the past. Could it be that we can learn something so simple – and profound – as the power of “relationship” as a strategy of implementing change from the Chinese?

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