

**CHANGE LEADER CAREER DEVELOPMENT:  
THE INTERPLAY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL, SPONSORSHIP, AND  
SELF IDENTITY DURING PLANNED ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE**

By

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper describes how in absence of strong sponsorship and often regardless of project outcome, leaders of high impact corporate change initiatives must simultaneously develop bonding social capital to become sustainable members of the enterprise's leadership team. This particularly holds for executives brought in from outside the firm to lead change. We present the findings of a qualitative research study of 42 projects led by 30 executive leaders from a diverse portfolio of primarily manufacturing companies, leaders who were either Insiders (those established within their firms) or Outsiders (leaders brought in as full time employees from outside the firm specifically to lead the project). The basis of this study was a conceptual model of the extent to which change leaders are embedded in and leverage internal and external social networks to contribute to favorable project outcome, influencing their career development upon completion of the change initiative. The grounded theory analysis has revealed a topology of traits characterizing change leader identity and presents the interplay of social capital (relationships, trust and shared norms in addition to the leveraging of social networks internal and external to the firm), sponsorship, and in the case of several change leaders, a shift in self identity that unfolds in the course of leading planned organizational change. Leading change can change leaders.

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Organizations today are challenged not just to deliver results, but to do so while changing how they do what they do. Leading change is not easy, and the classic term “change agent” often characterizes someone as a disruptive maverick sanctioned separately from the community to do something TO targets – other organizational actors affected by the change. Given the low success rate of projects as measured by realizing specific results and sustaining new enterprise methods, systems, and behaviors, it is not surprising that career fallout among change leaders is high (Buchanan, 2003). Companies must realize that human capital is becoming more central than financial capital (Kanter, 1999), particularly given the continued workforce aging in most of the industrialized world and the lack of births to offset the substantial loss. Organizations are thus focused on increasing and sustaining their change capacity by expanding their change leader cohort group through developing internal talent and hiring change leaders from the outside.

One of the keys to success in leading change is the infusion of new ideas, methods, and systems into an organization, elements commonly thought to be best brought to the party by leaders from outside of the organization. These leaders who have already led major change projects are known for having access to diverse networks to provide fresh perspectives. They have not been tainted by past successes and failures of the organization, nor are they constrained by embedded relationships with players within the system. The leaders are thus perceived as being better able to implement a new course of action.

Why is it that such change leaders, regardless of the outcome of the projects they lead, are often unable to earn a place within the firm’s leadership community and are eventually rejected by the firm? Why is it that firms seemingly then cannot live without

them, but perhaps cannot live with them? Are the traits and abilities that equip the leaders to lead change in conflict with those needed for sustainable leadership? Or is it something they do or do not do when leading change that affects their fit? Assuming they are motivated from the onset to become permanent members of the leadership team, does something change while leading change to produce this undesirable yet often predictable outcome?

Following a brief overview of the background literature and foundational theory from change agency, leadership and social capital domains, we will present our research methodology and findings. Discussion of findings will be summarized in five sections: Change Leader Identity, Crosscutting Findings, Distinctions between Insiders and Outsiders, Change Leaders and Project Outcome, and Change Leader Outcome. We close with implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

## **BACKGROUND LITERATURE AND THEORY**

The days of the classic vertically integrated corporation are all but over, with entities focusing on systems integration through outsourcing and global partnering (Kanter, 1999). The contemporary organization is being referred to as the network organization (Powell & Smith-Doerr, 1994), with an employee base expanded beyond fulltime employees to include contract, part time, and remotely-based contributors, some fenced within tiered supply firms and joint ventures. Many businesses are redefining their proprietary and strategic core competencies, permanently augmenting expertise through outsourcing, and for some firms, establishing alliances for the entire provision of some functions. Cross-functional teaming and more open sharing of information enabled by new communication technologies have resulted in flatter and potentially less bureaucratic organizations.

With the advent of the network organization the boundaryless career has also evolved, a career no longer confined within an organization of well-defined roles, positions, or jobs (Arthur, 1994). Given the shifts in organizational structures, labor markets, and changing personal values, it is no small wonder that employees have come to realize how careers comprised of progressing through a string of assignments within the same discipline or same firm may be a thing of the past. The word career now conveys a meaning deeper than a chronology of positions held. It is the accumulation of information and knowledge embodied in skills, expertise, and relationship networks acquired through an evolving sequence of work experiences (Bird, 1994). The network organization thus is an organization of connected pieces populated by individuals creating and leveraging internal and external networks to get work done and develop and advance their careers.

It is with this backdrop of change – change in the labor market, change in the concept of the organization, and change in the concept of career – that we turn to the criticality of organizations to select, develop, coach, and retain their change leaders (those vested with leading initiatives) in pursuit of enhancing the firm’s overall change capacity. Having the capability to change – change capacity – is often highlighted as a core competency for modern day firms (Klein, 2004). Change capacity refers to the successful and sustainable implementation of various interventions to address navigating radical change, typically induced by competitive pressure and/or in reaction to a business crisis, or implementing continuous improvement change, actions along a journey towards incrementally advancing the organization (Huy, 2001).

From the individual change leader’s perspective, a successful project means he achieved what he set out to do, ideally establishing a better organization and new ways of

doing business that will be sustainable after he moves on. It also means that the leader has added to his personal skills, capabilities, and knowledge portfolio. He has enhanced his experience base, personal confidence, resilience, and adaptability to lead change, in addition to building and becoming embedded in new networks (Buchanan, 2003).

Network access can validate how superiors, peers, subordinates, and other organizational actors regard him with increasing respect. While it is important to appropriately reward change leaders for a job well done, even more critical could be inclusion in the “going forward” organization. The extent to which a change leader is respected as a member of the leadership team will influence the number and variety of career opportunities open to him at the close of the project, ranging from assuming the leadership of yet another challenging change project to moving to a line, staff, functional or program/business unit assignment.

This research study relied upon theories developed within the social capital, social network analysis, organizational change, and leadership domains. Social Capital stresses the central importance of networks of strong, crosscutting personal relationships as a valuable resource for the conduct of social affairs. Members are provided with the collectively-owned capital, essentially a “credential” which entitles them to credit that can be applied to actions in the future. Whereas human capital refers to capability, social capital is opportunity, a valuable resource to leverage and like other forms of capital makes possible the achievement of certain ends that may not otherwise be obtainable (Coleman, 1988). In the leading of change initiatives, particularly within organizations comprised of extended enterprise groups (the network organization), networks – as opposed to formal reporting structure – often facilitate action. They lend accelerated access to resources (information, influence, power, and trust), and the ability to

disseminate information effectively through pivotal coalitions, channeling information in support of change, as well as information to diffuse resistance to change (Mohrman, Tenkasi & Mohrman, 2003; Tenkasi & Chesmore, 2003). In short, “who you know” affects “what you know,” particularly when timing (translated to cost) is of the essence. “Know who” can be as important to develop as “know how.”

The structural dimension of social capital refers to the actor’s embeddedness within the structure of relations within his group (“bonding” social capital) and the relations he has with another actor(s) within another group (“bridging” social capital) (Putnam, 2000). Bonding social capital looks inward, reinforcing exclusive identities and homogeneity of groups as the goodwill among people. It is a resource to enable reciprocity and build solidarity. Bridging social capital is by contrast outward looking, connecting people across diverse social cleavages. Bridging can generate broader identities, freer exchanges of ideas, and create for some a competitive advantage to pursue their ends. Better connected people enjoy higher returns (Burt, 2000).

Network closure versus brokerage across structural holes (bonding social capital as network closure, and bridging social capital as brokerage) results from information transmission between two people where the channel is referred to as a tie. Strong ties are associated with closure, reflected by frequent interaction, an extended history, and reciprocity in exchanges that allow for trust-based interactions (Krackhardt, 1992). Ties facilitate the flow of rich, detailed, and redundant information between individuals and groups. Weak ties are associated with brokerage, characterized by distant, infrequent relationships that may be casual and nonreciprocal, thus less obligatory in nature.

The structural hole argument defines social capital as the information and control advantages of being the broker in relations between people otherwise disconnected in a



social structure. Disconnected people stand on opposite sides of a hole in the social structure (Burt, 1997). A structural hole indicates that people on either side circulate in different information flows (not necessarily without knowledge of one another, but with little time to attend to the other's activities), such that someone who spans the hole with strong relations has contacts on each side, accessing both information flows. The more holes spanned, the richer the information benefits of the network (Burt, 2004).

As organizations build sustainable change capacity, consideration should be given to their change leaders' ability to develop various types of internal and external social networks. Are there potential distinctions between change leaders engaged from inside the firm and those hired from the outside that affect their ability to lead effectively and affect the outcomes of major projects?

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Our conceptual study focused on the extent to which change leaders leveraged social networks when leading initiatives within their firms, resulting in successful project outcomes and desired advancement within the firm. The interview sample to test the model shown in Figure 1 included 30 leaders who were a) Insiders – experienced leaders from within the firm, b) Outside Insiders – Insiders with the reputation of being “outside of the box,” well connected across and outside the unit or firm, and those with external experiences such as expatriate assignments, external boards, continuing education, and c) Inside Outsiders – leaders hired from outside as fulltime employees to specifically lead the change initiative. Outside consultants were not included.

**Figure 1**  
**Change Leader Career Development:**  
**The Leveraging of Social Networks in Planned Organizational Change**

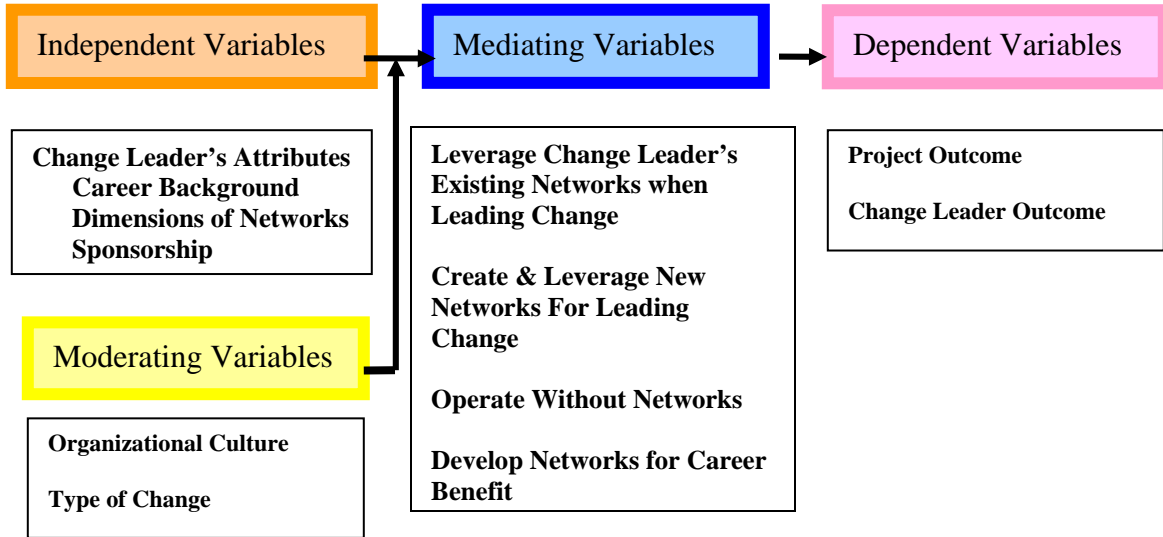


Figure 2 summarizes the initial conjectures of how the model could be operationalized for the types of networks predominantly leveraged (or proposed as ideally required) when leading change, and which type of networks are more likely to be leveraged and with what emphasis by the three categories of change leaders.

**Figure 2**      **Leveraging of Networks in a Context**

		Type of Change	
		Radical	Continuous Improvement
Organizational Culture	Hierarchical Structured	Closure And Brokerage	Closure
	Collaborative Open	Brokerage	Brokerage And Closure

**Note: Primary Dimensions of Change Leader Networks**  
 Insider- Closure  
 Outside Insider- Closure and Brokerage or Brokerage and Closure  
 Inside Outsider - Brokerage

The data set included 15 leaders from the co-investigator's place of employment, several of whom spoke of projects completed when they were at other firms. The co-investigator had had limited association with those interviewed, and was referred to the leaders by the president and several senior vice presidents. The other 15 leaders interviewed were from the co-investigator's personal network at other U.S. companies and from different industries.

Leaders were asked in advance to select one or two major, high impact change initiatives they were particularly proud of that demonstrated their passion for and process of leading change. If they wanted to discuss two projects, we recommended that one be radical and the other continuous improvement, two from different organizations, or one successful and one an unsuccessful/neutral outcome project to allow us to compare and contrast. In total, 23 of the resulting 42 projects discussed were from outside of the co-investigator's firm. Twelve of the thirty leaders discussed two projects within the 60 to 90 minute conversation. Twenty three interviews were conducted face-to-face, seven via telephone, and all were audio-taped and transcribed by a professional service. Appendix A outlines the 42 projects discussed and Appendix B is the 18-question interview protocol that included open and structured questions, with further probes utilized as the interview dynamic warranted.

While gender was not proposed as a model variable, the data set was intentionally constructed to be balanced between men and women (13, 17, respectively) and the project count of 42 is comprised of 18 projects led by men (13 radical, 5 continuous improvement) and 24 by women (15 radical, 9 continuous).

Table 1 summarizes the resulting data set intersection of change leader and change project outcomes, indicating the number of successful and unsuccessful/neutral

projects by project type discussed, as well as whether the change leader progressed within or left the firm (voluntarily or involuntarily). Appendix C is another cut of the data, an association tree starting with the culture of the organization. The data set appears to be sufficient in number and except for a skew towards successful projects, is balanced in diversity (type and content of project, background of change leader, outcome of change leader, organizational culture, gender, and projects inside and outside of the co-investigator’s firm) to offer a basis from which to develop generalized findings.

**Table 1**  
**Change Leader and Project Outcome Intersection**  
**from Thirty Qualitative Interviews**

	Insider stays Inside		Outsider becomes Insider	
	Radical	Continuous	Radical	Continuous
<b>Project Success</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Unsuccess or Neutral</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>
	Insider becomes Outsider*		Outsider stays Outside*	
	Radical	Continuous	Radical	Continuous
<b>Project Success</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Unsuccess or Neutral</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>3</b>

Total of 42 Projects discussed = Radical Change (24), Continuous Improvement (18)

Gender Balance = Men (13), Women (17)

\* = Outsider eventually exits the firm voluntarily or involuntarily

The analysis of more than 650 pages of transcription was based on a grounded theory approach with themes and concepts emerging from open coding within the ATLAS TI software system. Nearly 1,000 codes were initially identified and reduced to 400 through redundancy elimination and further structured into categories and subsets.

While the conceptual study sought to characterize the backgrounds of change leaders in three categories, it was problematic to discern a clear distinction between Insiders and Outside Insiders when selecting and interviewing candidates. This may be attributed to the sample selection process, as recommenders and the co-investigator may

have biased their selection at the onset to those with broad-based, cross-functional enterprise reputations. In that the interviewing process only involved the change leaders, as opposed to a 360-degree type approach (superior, peers, subordinates, and other stakeholders), it could be that leaders characterized themselves as Outside Insiders in a similar fashion. The two categories of inside change leaders have thus been collapsed into one for this paper and identified simply as Insiders. Outsiders are those hired as fulltime employees from outside the firm to lead change projects. In all cases the leaders had genuine interest at the onset of the project of staying within the firm post project.

## **FINDINGS**

This study was designed to explore the relationships between change leader attributes and the outcomes of their projects and careers, and the extent to which their network preferences might mediate those relationships. In the course of open coding, a battery of personal traits common at the core of the change leaders evolved, as did perspectives of sponsorship and self identity – assignment orientation, sphere of influence and personal change. We will discuss our findings on social network leveraging after briefly presenting a topology for change leader identity that includes important personal traits that may distinguish them from other leaders and managers. While Insiders and Outsiders appear to be of similar makeup, this study will reveal how leading change brings out leaders' differences.

### **Change Leader Identity**

Who are these leaders who volunteer, willingly accept or search out the opportunity to lead change assignments viewed by many as high stress, often out of the mainstream, and potentially career suicidal? Considering the magnitude of challenges within the 42 projects discussed (Appendix A), were these 30 leaders cut from a different

cloth? For radical change were they attracted to operating in chaos, perhaps causing disruption, “breaking” and rebuilding organizations, systems, and even people in a very tight timeframe? Or for continuous improvement, did they have more patience, fortitude, and resilience to carefully chart a course of action that required dancing two steps forward, one step backwards over a span of several years to incrementally advance the organization? Could change leader distinctions lend insight into why so many have led major projects more than once, or have made a career out of multiple “enlistments”?

Table 2 summarizes a battery of 38 traits found common to the thirty leaders in our study, a change leader identity that was not envisioned during the conceptual research phase. The data is categorized within five dominant characteristics: beliefs, values and guiding principles, motivations, behaviors, and attributes. Sixteen traits were commonly identified throughout almost all conversations of change projects (shaded), traits that will surface within the other findings. Appendix D shows the detailed data segmented by Insiders and Outsiders, per post project career outcome. These change leader traits were manifested regardless of the type of change project or organizational culture.

**TABLE 2**  
**Change Leader Identity Topology from Thirty Qualitative Interviews**

Beliefs	Values and Guiding Principles	
<b>Doing what is right</b> <b>Change is positive</b> <b>Change is a way of life</b> <b>Transform</b> <b>Will to succeed</b> <b>End justifies the means</b>	<b>Commitment/loyalty</b> <b>Personal accountability</b> <b>High standards</b> <b>Future focus</b> <b>Push change (command)</b> <b>Pull change (enable)</b>	<b>Owner operator/Autonomy</b> <b>Change team</b> <b>Teacher</b> <b>Develop others</b> <b>Learning</b>
Motivation	Behaviors	Attributes
<b>Challenge</b> <b>Unknown/pioneer</b> <b>Excitement</b> <b>Fun</b> <b>Big impact</b> <b>Fulfillment</b> <b>Altruism</b>	<b>Entrepreneurial</b> <b>Enterprising</b> <b>Maverik</b> <b>Risk taker</b> <b>Prone to action</b> <b>Personal sacrifice</b>	<b>Enthusiastic</b> <b>Inspirational</b> <b>Communication skills</b> <b>Decisive/confident</b> <b>Persistent/assertive</b> <b>Self-sufficiency</b> <b>People astute</b> <b>Self-awareness</b>

**Beliefs.** Change leaders unanimously were focused on doing what they felt was right. This was their mission. They believe change is positive, good, necessary, and for 70%, a continuous way of life, a given. Leading change for nearly all of those who were Outsiders or became Outsiders (80% for the total sample) meant more than fixing dysfunctional organizations. It meant transforming them to a place beyond what many might not know how to see, going beyond the expected outcome of the specific project.

“When I told people that we had to dial the project down and defer it before we fought it back to life, I had 350 people that were in tears, including me, because we had so much passion around the program and we knew what we did was right. The outcome was much bigger than the car itself; it was a totally new way of doing business for the company.”

Most change leaders in this study articulated an unwavering will to succeed and for them failure was not an option. One leader said “results are a license to take risks.” Eight participants spoke of how very goal-oriented they were, and adopted a belief that the end justified the means, as one leader spoke about when recruiting talent:

“We needed to have the best, the brightest, the A team and I didn’t hesitate to go the VP to intervene. In retrospect this hurt us, because over the years, while the program is viewed as a success in many respects technically and financially and for how we accomplished the new organization model, to this day it is not uncommon for people to comment: “Well, that program was different because you had the right people, the best and the brightest.” And to this day, I just don’t know how to counter that.”

**Values and Guiding Principles.** Commitment, loyalty, and personal accountability unanimously bound the study’s change leaders to their endeavors. Most spoke of very high standards of performance, in particular for themselves. More than 70% spoke of building and relying upon a strong team and often formed deep emotional attachments. As one leader who was also guided by the values similar to those of a business Owner/Operator shared:

“My initially declining the role had nothing to do with my career. It had everything to do with leaving. I’m the world’s worst leaver. Even this job that I have now, despite the wonderful promotion and the role is everything I ever wanted, I felt terrible about leaving and I told my new team when I came, “Look here. I was not really excited about leaving. It has nothing to do with coming. We had been through the good times and the bad times and when you put your heart and energy into leading change, there’s a lot of you left there.”

More than 80% of the leaders spoke of enabling change or pulling others into the process as opposed to commanding or pushing, although this is not to be read as their abdicating the central role of accountability. About 60% spoke of leading change that included learning and teaching others. One leader who was particularly proud of his focus on sustaining the results of his efforts (one successful project as an Insider, another as an Outsider) said, “It was more than just trying to get them all to sing out of the same songbook. I taught them to write the book themselves.”

Nearly all of the change leaders were anchored in the future and shaped the present with an incredible sense of urgency to pull towards the future. Five leaders spoke of how they were not afraid of or beyond capitalizing on chaos. One said:

“We caused a path of uncertainty to keep ideas on the table and our aperture open. If this had been continuous improvement, we would have been allowed to be in the bunker longer. We didn't know if we were in either place when we started, but we just knew we had to do something that was incredibly hard. The key to success in the midst of that chaos is to create and get people to come. You have to see the future differently and faster than the average bear, or otherwise you're not going to spiral out of it fast enough.”

**Motivations.** Change leaders unanimously were motivated by the challenge and high impact nature of their projects. They orchestrated action across boundaries. Several mentioned planning moves as if outguessing an opponent when playing chess. Nearly all were attracted to the pioneering nature of the work, the challenge of the unknown, the uncharted, and the unscripted. One spoke of being energized by being at the edge, relishing the freedom and autonomy of not following in anyone’s footsteps.



Fulfillment comes from meeting tall orders and big visions and the change leaders often position their endeavors to become the catalyst of other things to happen (referring back to more than 60% focused on developing others, 70% learning and teaching). Forty percent spoke of an altruistic goal to leave the people, not just the organization, better off than they were at the onset, and capable of even greater things. One change leader said of her legacy:

“I join companies not as an agent of change but an instrument of change. We often don’t really care enough about being a dynamic inspiration so that our light can shine or removing bushels to help people discover their own light. It isn’t just about getting individual lights to shine like a teacher does. I have changed people who wanted to be changed and created the environment to energize others to change.”

**Behaviors.** Leaders of change are entrepreneurial (85%), enterprising (70%), and are risk takers (75%). Fifty percent presented themselves as mavericks. In this group several spoke of assuming permission and seldom apologizing afterwards if taken to task. They knew how to work artfully (if not took great glee in being) under the radar of constraining bureaucracies. Being prone to fast action was a nearly unanimous behavior.

While most leaders were attuned as a guiding principle to engage or enable those affected by change (80%), one leader articulated her passion for moving the agenda forward quickly and chose to leave others behind, giving them no choice but to get on board. When asked if her peers supported bringing in an outside consultant she said:

“No, they did not, and this was one of the greatest learnings of change management for me, where I made a decision to not operate under the radar screen, (*laughs*) and that would be a little bit of an understatement. I chose to retain the outside consultants and not pass go, not get myself too involved in a debate because I could see there was going to be a lot of pushback. Before anybody really had a chance to object they were in, we were working, there was a lot of energy going and frankly, the train had left the station.”

It is interesting to note that risk taking and personal sacrifice are traits discussed by nearly all of the Outsiders and those Insiders who became Outsiders after completing

their change project(s). Analysis of the Insiders who remained inside surfaced these two traits only 50% of the time (7 or 8 of the 15). Tying back to personal accountability, personal sacrifice brought forth a picture several times from respondents of Atlas carrying the endeavor on his shoulders. It was not uncommon to hear the word “pain.”

“I was the lead acquirer and led the financial decision to shutdown and move everything to a new location. So my desire to be part of the future was personally very painful, because I was so engaged and affected. If I had decided it wasn't the right thing to do, personally I know I could have affected that. This was a very heavy burden and people knew it. There was this huge bridge between personal pain and professional pain that I managed down.”

None of those who mentioned stress, fatigue or adverse affects on their personal and family lives spoke of the need for or pursuit of relief or renewal when leading change.

This was left for when the project was complete.

**Attributes.** Five of the eight identity attributes were associated with all 30 leaders. Change leaders were enthusiastic and regarded as frank, candid, and transparent in their communications, as well as articulate and persuasive. Several cited as a personal strength knowing when not to take themselves too seriously, and using humor effectively during times of stress and conflict. All of the leaders spoke of leading with confidence, being decisive and deliberate in their actions, and admitted to being persistent and assertive. Nearly all of the change leaders spoke of situations where they were very adept at reading people, being particularly attuned to working across the levels and factions of their enterprises.

While the remaining three change leader traits of Table 2 do not have large percentages associated with them, Inspirational (67%), Self-sufficiency (30%), and Self-awareness (50%), associated actions made sections of these change leaders' stories quite compelling. “Inspirational” related to those who spoke in compelling ways, five sounding almost evangelical and attracting a committed following who joined them for

multiple change assignments. Half of the change leaders had a high degree of self awareness and routinely sought feedback from several advisors, as opposed to a set who admitted their bias for self-sufficiency and not wanting to take the time to slow down or thoughtfully reflect and change their course of action. They got their best advice from within. One leader said, “I would go introspective first and think it through from my own gut before I would go to anyone else.”

This study’s Change Leader Identity Topology was interpreted from the eyes of the change leaders through our analyzing their stories. Had we solicited 360 degree feedback from those who observed the leader in action, perhaps other prevalent traits would have been identified. People objecting to the change project or those who were adversely affected by how the change leader led might have identified more negative traits. Some of the change leaders voluntarily discussed negative tendencies and consequences, most often situation-specific, or rationalized in terms of lack of time or the means being justified by the end – the success of the project. While there is usually no shortage of tension around leading change, most leaders in this study were absolutely fine with this. Six leaders said, “It just comes with the territory.”

Several of the leaders spoke in terms of “my way being the right way,” and use of first person pronoun, “I”, was not uncommon although this could be interpreted in the study as strengthening ownership and accountability. One leader, however, utilized “I” throughout the entire interview except when retelling interactions with the customer when he spoke of his team or “we”. Another expressed how in his heart he was committed to doing what he thought was right, and this reinforced his then “being right” and taking certain license for action. He said:

“As a change agent I have the belief that I’m right and because I am driven to help others, I want others to do things my way. Those two things are what

have motivated me to be a change agent, as opposed to just sit in my little corner as an individual contributor and be happy with the way I personally do things. I have a belief that the enterprise will be more successful if they do it my way, and because I want to be a helpful person, I want to get out there and help them get there.”

Is there any wonder why many professionals might not sign up to lead change projects? Or as further discussion will now illustrate how it is that some change leaders find or place themselves outside the boundaries, are misunderstood or end up *persona non grata* post project?

### **Crosscutting Findings**

The following three findings crosscut all 30 interviews, two being surprising departures from the original concept model.

**Type of Change.** This study involved 24 radical change and 18 continuous improvement projects as characterized by the leaders themselves. Leaders spoke of radical projects being in response to the challenges of a significant, urgent departure from past business conditions, or needing to rectify organizational performance problems under intense pressure. Changes were dramatic and needed to be done quickly, deeply, and thoroughly. Time was a major forcing function and “displacing the past” was often discussed. Several leaders mentioned how “the situation drove me to do this, even though I knew there would be ramifications.” Mitigating risks often confined the leaders to leveraging social networks with which they were already comfortable. In general, leading radical change, particularly as openly discussed by Outsiders, involved having to carry the weight of negative emotional attractors projected by those affected by the change (Buchanan, 2003). Most of the Insiders made little mention of these attractors, but spoke instead of working as a community and relying on trusted colleagues to advance their agenda.

Continuous improvement projects, on the other hand, while often in response to external conditions and challenges internal to the firm, were portrayed as fundamentally positive and building from stable, understood conditions. Endeavors were focused on incrementally improving the business and several spanned multiple business cycles. The leaders spoke of patience and longer term strategizing. More so than in radical projects, the leaders (Insider and Outsiders) had a greater opportunity if they so chose to develop networks and deeper relationships – bonding social capital – with those engaged in making the change happen, and at best, those affected by the change.

Not all change leaders were interested in or adept at leading the two type of change projects. Seven stated a preference for leading radical projects. One said:

“It’s really hard to drive change without a threat, a competitor, or a drastic shift in conditions. How many times do you hear of people who don’t take care of their health until they have a serious scare, and then all of the sudden they’re a health nut. Something drove them to do that instead of just thinking about it. It’s harder to get people to buy in that your vision is better if what they’ve been doing has worked just fine for 30 years. It’s exhausting because you have to keep reframing the challenge – how can I say it a different way AGAIN that will capture them? In a crisis we may not immediately know what we’re going to do, but there’s no question why.”

**Organizational Culture.** The conceptual phase of this research posited that the culture of an organization would have a moderating effect on the extent to which change leaders leverage social networks, and could influence the optimum type of networks developed and employed per the change leaders’ background (Figure 2). Surprisingly, this moderating effect was not verified through the qualitative interviewing process.

Per the outcome tree in Appendix C, 28 projects were led within hierarchical/structured firms, and 14 within more open/collaborative firms, culture being confirmed by the change leaders during the interview. Analysis of the transcriptions in various groupings did not surface distinctions between the stories when considering the leaders’

traits or their actions around networks, social capital, sponsorship, and personal change. In the case of radical projects, one leader from an open, collaborative culture summed it up saying, “A crisis is a crisis regardless of culture, and I had to become autocratic and take charge.”

**Career Network Development.** A second surprising finding was the reaction of interviewees to questions of career planning and career network development in anticipation of post-project placement. All leaders said they were singularly focused on leading the change project, and they did nothing unique in terms of developing tangential networks or contacts in anticipation of a next move. Insiders in particular saw their assignment to lead change as a “job” within a string of assignments that the organization or a sponsor orchestrated on their behalf. They referenced an innate loyalty to the firm, a more “I’ll do whatever the company wants me to do – and whenever” attitude. Outsiders often voiced that “my career has taken care of itself” without a plan, and one said how “not thinking about my career gives me the ability to take more risks”.

“I was so passionate and so excited about pushing the envelope I basically gave no thought whatsoever to my own personal career and what it might mean. That would have been selfish. I took it head on, because I felt it was the right thing to do, and I could not live in an environment given the leadership role I had and not feel as though I was letting down people that worked under me. I would have been abdicating my leadership responsibility.”

### **Distinctions between Insiders and Outsiders**

Of the 42 projects led by the 30 change leaders, 27 projects were led by the leaders as Insiders and 15 as Outsiders. Factors differentiating Insiders and Outsiders per the interview data are clustered in five areas, summarized in Table 3.

**Table 3 Distinctions between Inside and Outside Change Leaders**

	<b>Insider</b>	<b>Outsider</b>
<b>Assignment Orientation</b>	<p><b>Bounded</b>                      A "Job", series of tasks against a plan of action                      Focus on the assignment                      Committed to sustainable outcome for affected unit</p>	<p><b>Unbounded</b>                      A "Role" as change leader, one amidst a series of opportunities                      Venue for launching big things                      Committed to sustainable outcome, transferring capability and scaling up</p>
<b>Sphere of Influence</b>	<p><b>Local</b>                      Loyal to the firm, unit or function; committed                      "Play me when and where you need me"</p>	<p><b>Global</b>                      Loyal to the change profession, committed                      The bigger the role the better                      Dedicated to the firm</p>
<b>Sponsorship</b>	<p><b>Passive</b>                      Legitimization, voice                      Limited roadblock removal</p>	<p><b>Active</b>                      Access, entre                      Value most obvious when lost</p>
<b>Social Capital</b>	<p><b>Relationships</b>                      Bonding social capital                      Some bridging social networks</p>	<p><b>Information</b>                      Internal social networks for a specific purpose                      Extensive bridging networks                      Bridging social capital for support and counsel</p>
<b>Sources of Ideas</b>	<p><b>Inside</b>                      Primarily within closed unit                      Outside for special skills or knowledge not found inside</p>	<p><b>Outside</b>                      Primarily from outside the firm, inside to co-opt others and become aware of history</p>

One third of the Insiders were either requested by name for the change assignment or directed to lead the endeavor. For another third, the project was a logical extension of their current position. The final eight were split between volunteering or campaigning for the opportunity when hearing about it, or creating the project idea they led. All Insiders spoke of their assignment orientation as a bounded experience, a “job” or “part of my job,” with 15 projects categorized as radical and 12 as continuous improvement. More than half of the leaders stayed post the project to sustain the endeavor in their unit. Five

of the radical projects evolved into a continuous improvement change mode and the leaders remained in place for more than five years.

Outsiders, on the other hand, were as every bit committed to delivering sustainable results for the project, demonstrating leadership traits similar if not identical to those of Insiders, but had an *unbounded* view of the opportunity. They identified with something bigger than just leading the project. Of the 15 projects led by Outsiders, nine of the leaders were hired specifically to lead projects to drive change (six radical, three continuous improvement), and six leaders defined the projects quickly upon joining the units and sizing up the situation (three of each type of change project). All of the leaders spoke of the project as a platform from which to rise further within the firm, with five pursuing transferring the capability to tangential units, and one successfully deploying new processes across the full enterprise. None of the Outsiders spoke of having an interest in sustaining the project after the major change phases, and the six Outsiders who became Insiders moved on to prominent and larger, challenging assignments.

In terms of sphere of influence, all of the Outsiders portrayed themselves as being committed to leading change as if it was an ongoing global professional role, whereas most of the Insiders were tied to the job within the local context of commitment and loyalty to the firm, or specific unit/function affected by the change project. This does not mean that several Insiders did not search out subsequent change assignments, but many spoke in general of their careers as a collection of key jobs that built upon one another.

As one Insider said:

“I always worried about just doing a really good job, and I was lucky enough that my career took care of itself. Now, maybe that’s a little bit naïve and maybe you have to have put a little energy behind personal training, but I don’t think I ever put any big effort into it thinking about it, particularly when asked to lead a project as demanding and important as this one was.”



During the conceptual phase, sponsorship was thought to be an independent variable, a distinguishable attribute of the change leaders at the onset of the project. In our interviews, however, the role of sponsorship surfaced more as a moderator as it related to the change leader's leveraging of a sponsor for resources and access to networks. Insiders and Outsiders alike spoke of their role in terms of autonomy, control or "my show", such that acknowledgement of a sponsor(s) did not come without probing. Insiders spoke of these associations more in terms of a passive legitimization of position. One said, "The president was always there, but I rarely needed him. Just our assumed association gave me voice, gave me power." Less than 30% of the Insiders discussed invoking sponsors for advice, intervention or lending direct access to information and resources, compared with 50% for Outsiders. Outsiders were more inclined to mention sponsors, particularly when the sponsorship waned or was lost.

"You immediately cannot detach the leader or the personality from a function that's driving radical change unless you have someone sitting at the top sanctioning you, and saying "You're going to give this leader the leverage, the time, the authority to go do the right thing for our business. And I don't want to hear you talk about this otherwise. If you've got an issue, get in his office. You go whine to him about it, and you two work it out." If you're not given that supportive authority, it makes your endeavor and your charter very, very difficult."

This sponsorship distinction between Insiders and Outsiders may be connected to the role of social capital, as will be discussed next, where the Insiders interviewed often spoke of supportive relationships throughout the organization to rely upon, compared to the singular role of a sponsor that may be engaged more often or visibly by the Outsider. As one Insider said when discussing social capital:

"I didn't have the power in myself. I had the power because it was opened up by people who took the voice and there was a team. It was team power. I was legitimized through the power of others whose influence I was connected to."

While the conjectures of the conceptual model focused on the extent to which change leaders leveraged social *networks* (Figure 2), the qualitative study has surfaced a clear distinction between Insiders and Outsiders. Insiders referenced the leveraging of relationships, friendships, building trust, sharing of common experiences, and social networks of closure inside the unit or firm from which they accessed information and resources – bonding social capital. Only a few Insiders used the term “network”, instead referring to people by name. One Insider put it quite strongly:

“About 20% of what I was able to get done was because of my job title and the respect it commanded. The other 80% was because of who I know. I could call almost anybody – and I knew who to call – because I had known them for years and they knew I wasn’t kidding. Sam and I had hooks everywhere. We had credibility that we knew how to do this. We worked that way for years and so when we said, “Here’s what we need and here’s why,” they believed us. We didn’t have to have a big debate on why or if we really knew what we were doing.”

Outsiders predominantly spoke of developing or accessing networks to gather and influence information, with minimal reference to deeper relationships except when referring to associations from outside of the firm. Networks were often discussed by Outsiders in terms of physical proximity or co-location, for example:

“There were two functions that I needed to get real close to, manufacturing who was going to be the victims or the beneficiaries of my designs, and marketing as I was going to be the beneficiary or the victim of their views. So, I looked around and the office area where the Vice President of Manufacturing sat at one end, the Vice President of Marketing sat at the other end. There was one vacant office between them and I said, “I want that office.”

This distinction – social networks as a *component* of social capital – is of prominent importance, particularly in recognizing a sizeable challenge or an inherent disadvantage which outside change leaders may have, regardless of the value of their external ideas, unique experiences, and the new connections they bring to the firm.

Of no great surprise, Insiders typically relied on those within their units for ideas, capitalizing on readily accessible, proven, and trusted ties (closure). One leader relates:

“So I walked into the program, and I’m looking for people I know. Who’s who? There was a Chief Engineer that I knew and trusted very much, and the same for the Business Manager. There was a Production Programs Manager that was high energy, great guy, but I didn’t trust him. Trust is a funny thing. I don’t mean I didn’t trust him as he was not ethical. He just didn’t see the world the way I thought we would be successful. I was in a position on September 12<sup>th</sup> [post the 911 terrorist attack] where I needed people who could basically read my mind.”

When recruiting talent, several Insiders said they went outside for special skills and experience sets only after exhausting possibilities inside, and even then identifying sources through someone they knew inside the firm (bridging social networks). Outsiders often go outside the firm through their networks to find the best and brightest regardless of location; however, all six of the Outsiders who became insiders did cultivate inside relationships to become aware of and sensitive to the history of the organization and co-opt those affected by the change.

### **Change Leaders and Project Outcome**

Earlier it was depicted how organizational change capacity is linked to the building of organizational tolerance and embracing change projects. This is primarily enabled by a history of successful and sustainable project outcomes, although some firms view failed projects as an investment in learning and thus part of the journey of maturing capability. The data of this study does not suggest either type of leader being more or less successful in leading change over the other, regardless of project type. Table 4 summarizes the subtle distinctions between Insiders and Outsiders per the outcomes of the 34 successful (21 radical, 13 continuous improvement) and eight (three, five) unsuccessful/neutral projects.

**Table 4 Distinctions for Change Leaders and Project Outcome**

	<b>Successful</b>	<b>Unsuccessful/Neutral</b>
<b>Insider Change Leader</b>	<p>Strong model for change based on personal experience</p> <p>Bonding social capital leveraged expanded; embeddedness, strong ties, longstanding relationships</p> <p>Bridging social networks for ideas, skills not available inside</p> <p>Sponsorship assumed, most commonly invoked in radical change</p>	<p>Lack of internal bridging networks; reputation only within tight closure of unit</p> <p>Project lost sponsorship, not necessarily the leader</p> <p>Externality; Not viewed within the leader's sphere of control</p>
<b>Outsider Change Leader</b>	<p>Strong model for change based on personal experience plus often external knowhow and awareness</p> <p>Bonding social networks to get the job done; potential for social capital if longer project</p> <p>Bridging social capital leveraged and expanded for ideas and support</p> <p>Sponsorship invoked as if it were bonding social capital</p>	<p>Bonding social capital not built or accessed; leader excluded</p> <p>Change leader lost sponsor</p> <p>Change model not in harmony with the organization</p> <p>Project slid back with exit of change leader</p> <p>Externality; should have been addressed by change leader</p>

All of the leaders spoke clearly of their model for leading change, their version of “know how” to deliver results. Except where the model may not have fit the organization’s culture, for example an Outsider’s replacing instead of developing leaders in a culture that prized years of service, which contributed to the project’s failure, the attributes of the models used by Insiders and Outsiders were not distinguishable. Various combinations or *degrees* of leveraging social capital and social networks (for both, bonding and bridging), sponsorship, and externalities did affect the outcomes, as the following examples will illustrate.

An Insider who led a successful international, radical change project spoke of expanding and leveraging his bonding social capital, consistent with the theme expressed in all 27 of the Insider interviews of group closure. He shared:

“I would host monthly breakfasts with my three peers that morphed into each one of them wanting to host, so we then alternated. We didn’t actually talk business very much, but just in developing those relationships over the year it provided a foundation to do business. You didn’t have to negotiate a lot when trouble set in. Mutual trust is something that is very difficult for me to explain and quantify, but it’s hugely important. We cared and wanted to make a difference for the time.”

Another Insider who developed a very tight, cohesive, and supportive organization referred to the negative consequences of “ties that bind, can blind” however, which contributed to difficulties on her radical project. She said:

“The biggest mistake that I made was allowing us to become isolated from the mainstream of manufacturing. We were very successful, but we didn’t have the same peer network that the other plants had to lean on. Everyone else was in a different place with technology, and all of a sudden this was between what I do, how I do it, who I didn’t know and how everyone else had already moved.”

Another Insider referred to his tight teams as being comprised of “righteous martyrs”, noble to stand on their own and not wanting to leverage ideas and resources from across the enterprise, which while the immediate project succeeded, the leaders were unable to get others to adopt their best practices. Perhaps a tendency towards self-sufficiency on the leaders’ part contributed to this (Table 2). Some leaders felt in the end that their work did not have nearly the high impact that it could have had, and spoke of the results not meeting standards for high personal performance, adversely coloring their sense of fulfillment.

The power of accessing outside ideas from multiple networks was no better illustrated than by an Outsider hired as a senior executive for a company undergoing a turnaround. She speaks here of networks and rich bridging social capital for counsel:

“This sustained me on every possible level, as this was nothing I had ever tackled before. I ended up going outside to multiple key groups. I went to some of the best and the brightest VPs of HR I had known and cultivated deep relationships with, and just said, I need your help. I was able to join a couple professional associations and thus I had the benefit of some of the wisest people out there. And I went to colleagues, not only HR executives, but some of the line executives that I’d known from my past because we needed their expertise on helping think through our business strategy. I chose a couple of key external consultants that were out of our system, if you will, but in the system. They kept me connected with deep resources on the outside. Otherwise, we would have failed.”

One of the four Insiders of an unsuccessful project mentioned losing his sponsor, leaving the firm, and the project being unable to maintain sustainable results. The three other Insiders moved to new challenging assignments inside the firm. The four Outsiders who led unsuccessful projects all voluntarily left their firms in time. They described a deep sense of frustration and disappointment and having being alone or excluded. Only one of the four mentioned when asked what he would have done differently, however, that he would have taken more time in getting to know the organization and build a stronger, trusting cohort group. Perhaps in absence of this, the following transpired:

“I sought out my boss’s and peers’ advice, but frankly what I got back most of the time was of no help. It was not coaching or interaction. It was my answer’s wrong, or I often got the feeling the organization wasn’t sure to trust me as a person. The magnitude of this change seemed too big for them to understand. So, I stopped going for advice and just moved forward. I kind of tuned it out and went forward to do the right thing. Everything just got quiet.”

The quotation above reminds us well of our first topology trait, that change leaders regardless of whether they are from the inside or hired from the outside hold as fundamental the belief that what they are doing is right.

### **Change Leader Outcome**

The findings of this study are based on conversations with 15 change leaders who were Insiders and remained with the firm post change, four Insiders who became Outsiders, six Outsiders who became Insiders and eight Outsiders who left the firm,

(Table 2). Table 5 summarizes change leader outcomes in terms of the distinctions between types of social capital and networks, strength and sustainability of sponsorship, and personal change, spanning learning to identity shift or transformation.

**Table 5 Distinctions for Change Leaders and Their Outcome**

	<b>Insider Following the Project</b>	<b>Outsider Following the Project</b>
<b>Insider Onset of Project</b>	<p>High bonding social capital to protect against negative emotional attractors of leading change, "one of us"</p> <p>Learned new skills, personal development -- even failed project viewed as "learning"</p> <p>Expanded networks inside and outside the firm</p> <p>Willing to lead the sustaining effort post project closure</p>	<p>Transformed beyond an ability to regain social capital; renegade, over the edge behaviors rationalized as being driven by the situation</p> <p>Legacy of how, not what was done; means may have caught them in the end</p> <p>Bridging social networks and new skills negate desire to stay; attracted to leave</p>
<b>Outsider Onset of Project</b>	<p>Continued change leader role in another assignment; expanded internal networks; developed some bonding social capital</p> <p>Strong sponsorship; protection from rejection as required</p> <p>Developed bonding social capital for continuous improvement project</p> <p>Self awareness; transformed to fit into the organization</p>	<p>Transformed beyond an ability to build social capital; behaviors rationalized as being driven by the situation</p> <p>Legacy of how, not what was done; means may have caught them in the end</p> <p>Lack of bonding social capital results in exclusion and rejection; spurs lack of desire to stay</p> <p>Loss of sponsorship</p>

It appears that leading change changed leaders, whether the project was successful or unsuccessful. Insiders commonly spoke about learning, skills development, and new contacts. The three Insiders whose projects had unsuccessful or neutral outcomes, yet they stayed with the firm, spoke of their experiences in terms of “what I learned” instead of “how I failed.” Their careers did not appear to have been

adversely affected, nor did they discuss how others projected the adverse effects of change on them. Four Outsiders whose projects failed and they left the firms spoke of how they became such targets of blame. One of the Insiders went on to successfully lead a rekindled version of her earlier failed radical project, and in fact remained leading the sustaining effort for several years.

Four of the Insiders, interestingly all of whom became Outsiders, and many Outsiders who also left their firms after the change project spoke about “being changed.” They discussed in detail how the experience led to a personal transformation or shift in identity. New perspectives, skills development and the success of the project shifted the following leader from having an identity as an owner operator to connecting with a team leadership model. He felt he no longer fit the firm’s classic leadership model and in time left the firm.

“Once you stretch your mind to a new dimension, it doesn’t go back. I just couldn’t ever go back. Through this project I brought the high performance team concept to the forefront, and I took it to my later assignments. I changed because of leading change.”

Another Insider spoke dramatically of how her portfolio of change leadership experiences had shaped her. She moved across major divisions of her firm and eventually left, despite the successful outcome of two landmark projects.

“If you’re interested in change - in changing an organization - you have to be willing to be changed. When you’re at that front edge moving forward and cutting through things you’re going to be affected, and not always in a good way. Sometimes it’s hard, it hurts and there are consequences and mistakes. No one’s perfect – and that has to be OK. You have to be willing to get bruised and battered a little bit. I’ve always sort of put myself out there and I like to, it’s in my makeup. I like what I end up becoming afterwards, but it isn’t always a pretty process.”

In that there are at least two sides to a story, all of the factors contributing to the 12 leaders leaving their firms after their projects may not have surfaced during the



interviews. Perhaps these leaders had exhibited behaviors that essentially destroyed social capital to result in exclusion, or put another way, behaviors which prevented relationships from forming, leading to lack of inclusion. One Outsider who led two successful projects spoke of being alone:

“I became incredibly lonely and really depressed, isolated and without inside confidants. This had been like combat, which you can do for a couple of years and then you can’t do it anymore. But did I learn a lot about me? Yes, and I wouldn’t have missed it. I learned a lot about what is important to me, what I am made out of. What do I need to know, do, be, to make it through and lead change. I changed.”

Six leaders when we probed about personal development during their change project made no obvious mention of either learning, growing or developing, or a shift in identity. Their lack of interest or crispness in answering the questions and probes may not indicate they did not change, but perhaps they felt the topic was not as significant as others to discuss. They had focused on getting the job done. Five of the leaders who remained inside were Insiders of successful radical projects, and one was an Outsider whose project failed and he left the firm. Interestingly, all six leaders had a distinct strong model for leading change (“I just knew my way was the right way”), utilized first person pronoun “I” predominantly throughout the interview, surrounded themselves with individuals much like themselves, and spoke repeatedly of autonomy. They made limited or no mention of developing others, teaching or learning in the course of leading change.

Finally, identity shift should not be thought of only in negative terms, with leaders voluntarily or involuntarily leaving their firms. Two Outsiders who became Insiders spoke of their personal transformations in a very positive way. Both of their radical projects were successful and one leader led the follow-on continuous improvement phase.

“I really felt that leading this change was an unfolding of what needed to manifest itself in my life, on my journey. It felt absolutely right over those years. I am profoundly grateful for that opportunity in terms of the maturity

and the ability to contribute that it provided. The experience profoundly affected me as a human being and I felt like for the first time I stayed long enough in a role, the buck stopped with me, and that I grew tremendously.”

This leader developed and maintained a tremendous sense of self-awareness throughout the experience, having pursued therapy to insure she remained centered. Both leaders spoke of forming lifelong friendships, in other words, bonding social capital. The second Outsider spoke proudly and nostalgically of how he completely reoriented his work identity. He said:

“I had to figure out who I was in this mission of change, and where did I really get my joy from working. And I found that my joy is in growing others – watching them “get it”, becoming independent human beings in their own right. What I found out from my own personal growth was it is about being part of helping others succeed. This was a huge shift for me. Leading a change like this was a once in a lifetime experience that I shared with 6600 people all over the world. I realize that I’ll probably never find that again; but, I’ve experienced it and the experience was worth it.”

## IMPLICATIONS

We draw this study to a close by discussing the two primary implications of our findings, findings which uncovered for change leaders the interplay between social capital, sponsorship, and self identity during planned organization change.

### ***1. Bonding social capital formation is critical for successful change leader outcome.***

In the absence of strong sponsorship, Outsiders hired to lead radical change seldom get the opportunity to become Insiders regardless of project outcome. This is a result of how much bonding social capital is bruised, destroyed or prohibited from forming during the change project. Radical change is often perceived by those affected as negative and displacing of the past. Time is seldom available for bonding social capital to form easily, going beyond social *networks* as the highway for information and resources transfer, to include deeper relationships. Once through the change, people often remember how the change leader did what he did, not necessarily what he did and

to what positive avail. The “evils of change” are projected on the leader and even if the project has a positive outcome, the organizational “antibodies” may push the leader out or sub-optimize his ability to perform.

This does not so frequently play out for Insiders, as they are often viewed as a member of the family who by circumstance ended up leading the effort. Others feel that external forces drove the leaders to do what they did and how they did it. In essence, bonding social capital protects the Insider, and if the project fails or has neutral results, he is apt to get a “career bye”. He and the organization view the experience as learning instead of failure.

In the case of continuous improvement, the nature of the work is more building from the positive past, and incrementally advancing the organization. These projects evolve over a timeframe typically longer than expected, allocated or required of radical change projects. This situation is more amenable to the development or increasing of change leader bonding social capital.

Given how radical change may not allow time for Outsiders to develop “protective” bonding social capital, organizations may want to consider one of the following to fill the void: a) assign Outsiders to lead quick turn continuous improvement projects before leading radical change in order to build foundational bonding social capital, b) “surrounding” Outsiders with a select group of strong inside change team members with extensive networks and positive reputations for participation in change projects, in order to bridge the gap and complement the leader’s efforts to establish these relationships, c) at the time of on-boarding, identify peers capable of providing coaching and feedback, and ensure that the project and change leader sponsor(s) are sensitive to this need, in particular providing access to “the right” relationships.

In absence of one or more of these types of explicit actions, strong and continuous sponsorship may be required throughout and post the project. Active sponsorship involving interventions could contribute to ensuring the success of both the change leader and the project.

## ***2. Leading change can change leaders.***

Several Insiders and Outsiders shared in their stories of how they "outgrew" the company and had less desire to stay post the change project. This reflected an accumulation of personal learning, exposure to new and different ideas (often as a result of outside bridging social networks), and the successful demonstration of new skills. The leader was attracted to pursue new frontiers and their values and guiding principles may have no longer matched those of the firm.

Perhaps leaders of change, however, get to a point where they are so singularly focused on and consumed by the delivery of the goal that they view the project outcome as bigger than the initial intent, and then move forward as if on an unstoppable religious mission of more global (beyond the local unit) significance. They assume a sort of unchecked empowerment sanctioned via real or perceived sponsorship or protective bonding social capital, striving for in their mind "what is right." They could become cavalier, reckless and/or overlook political barbed wire inside the firm. The change leader may also simply become fed up, frustrated or worn down from the "dance", and choose to move faster than the organization can follow as the change project unfolds, i.e. they do not appreciate if others are following either willingly or unwillingly.

Change leaders, in absence of acute self-awareness or openness to informed coaching, or both, can fall prey to self-destructive behaviors and actions that in other contextual situations they would know through experience not to do. In absence of the

change leaders knowing how to articulate this “growing beyond” or “going beyond” to himself and taking action with a trusted source of feedback, the leader may be unaware of a self identity shift. A switch could have been flipped or tipping point reached during a phase of the leaders’ growth and learning or a phase of the project itself to influence a trajectory predetermining an exit from the firm. He could go through a personal birthing process where pain is accepted in order to get to a better place, a personal sacrifice in an organizational sense that is not without cost. The change leader then cannot stay as he no longer fits, or falls off track by essentially destroying social capital that could have earned him the opportunity to stay and progress. Subconsciously his behaviors may have driven him towards actions that ensure his ultimate exit.

Every positive trait in our Change Leader Identity Topology, if taken to an extreme, could become a detriment, particularly in the eyes of those uncomfortable or resistive to change. Change leaders can be renegades and rule breakers and operate with reckless abandon. They can be openly bold. Depending upon levels of trust (or distrust), they could be characterized as political and manipulative, self-serving, and out for themselves. Decisiveness can tilt towards controlling and autocratic, with a penchant for unwillingness to consider others’ views – “my way is the right way, and the only way.”

Rather than serve as facilitative leaders they could gravitate towards being the figurehead for change, the leader of the show, and slide into “I” instead of enabling “we” characterizations of actions and accomplishments. Being expedient at all cost (the end justifies the means) and often under pressure to deliver results, the change leaders could be viewed as disrespectful of or insensitive to the past, treating people as expendable resources instead of human beings. They may be viewed as conquerors, being

intimidating, feared and seen as tough, unemotional and calloused individuals. These tendencies are in conflict with the formulation of bonding social capital.

These traits to a negative extreme may have also been demonstrated by some of the Insiders and Outsiders which stayed with their firms. Negative effects could have been mitigated by other factors, such as sponsorship intervention or community tolerance due to strong relationships from earlier shared experiences. Change targets may have chosen to attribute ill will to circumstances beyond the leaders' control or outside of their mutual tight community. The leader may have taken specific action to apologize or make amends. Bonding social capital is characterized by these types of factors.

Just as change leaders consider the game of change like playing chess, imagining several moves ahead, firms should consider the same when identifying change leaders – Insiders and Outsiders – to execute projects and build organizational change capacity. As our study reveals, Outsiders in particular view themselves leading change as a career role, something much bigger and broader than a “job” of leading a change project. Placement of leaders at the onset should be with multiple cascading assignments or realistic options in mind, such as a succession of change positions across the enterprise, a segue from the project to a more traditional operational role, or the explicit conversion of the change leader to being the sustain leader of the affected unit.

This study is *not* advising against hiring outside change leaders, nor is it positing that either Insiders or Outsiders do a better job or have a higher likelihood of successful projects and careers with the firm, regardless of the type of change project. To the contrary, this study should open eyes to the merits of a mix of change leaders, but not without careful understanding of the career orientation of the leaders, degree of self-awareness, and ability to develop, maintain, and retain bonding social capital. Building

organizational change capacity goes far beyond sizing up the need for external access to ideas and networks and an understanding of the pace and context of a project. A change leader cohort group as a blend of Insiders and Outsiders, recognizing a potential increased investment for some in social capital development teamed with sponsorship to mitigate risk of exit post project, could be a powerful combination for developing sustainable enterprise talent.

### **LIMITATIONS**

As diverse as the dataset of change leaders was, coupled with the interview protocol with extensive probes, potential limitations of this study should be mentioned:

1. The experience base of the change leaders in leading change (number of projects, mix of earlier and later radical change and/or continuous improvement projects they have led, number within each place of employment, etc.) was not specifically surveyed. This could have provided an interesting perspective on such facets as individuals' learning curves and lend further insight into identity.
2. Project and change leader outcomes were only viewed from the eyes of the change leader, as opposed to a 360 degree view. Feedback from several perspectives could have lent insight into if other phenomenon beyond those discussed in this study were playing out. Negative traits of change leader identity could also have surfaced.
3. The dataset did not include any change leaders who led a project that failed and the leader did not progress, but opted to stay. These outcomes may offer additional phenomenon to explain a leaders' desire to stay post change.
4. All but four interviewees were selected from for-profit manufacturing companies. To ensure the ability to generalize findings for the conceptual model, one should consider including a distribution of change leaders from service industries, government and non-profit enterprises.

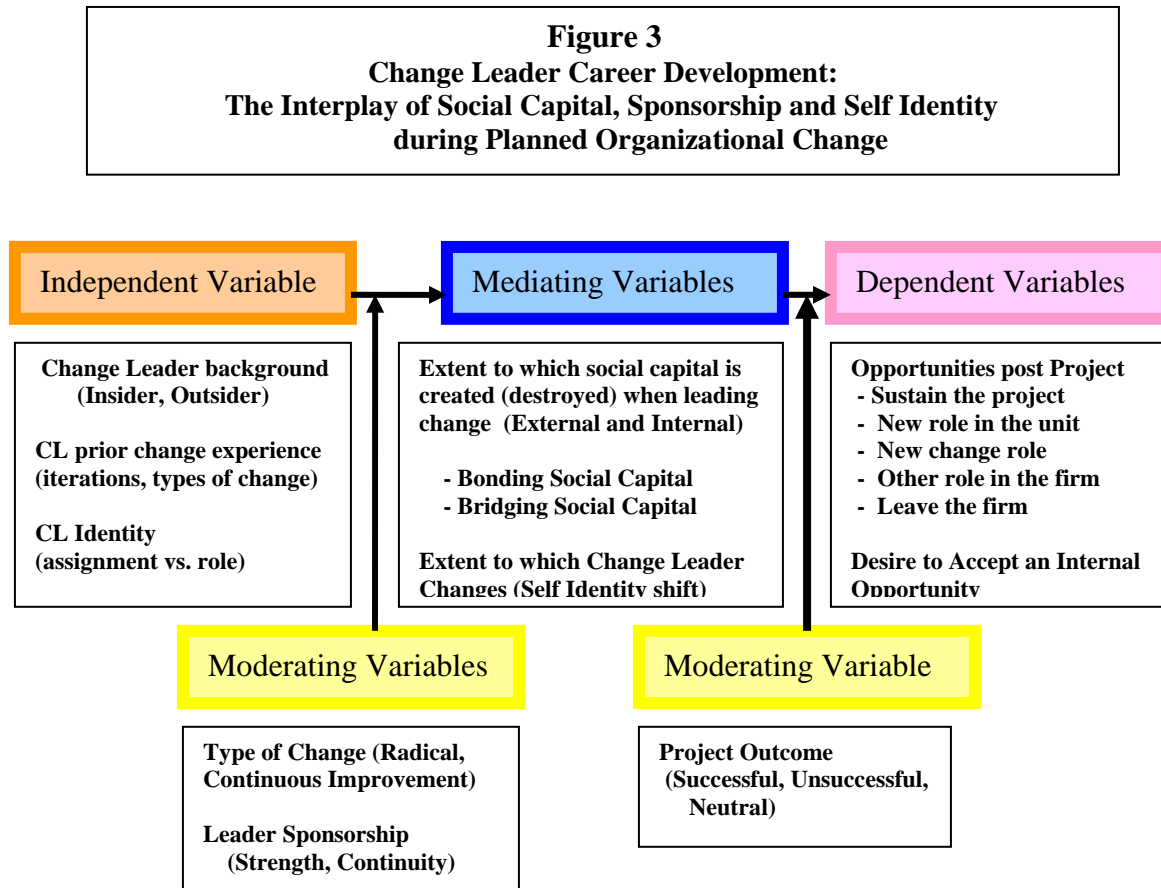
### **FUTURE RESEARCH**

With the body of academic and practitioner work within the intersection of change agency in planned organizational change and social capital currently limited, the

results of this study and application of qualitative methods bring to light several recommendations for future complementary research.

- a) Researchers are encouraged to study all of the facets of social capital. The field of social *network* analysis often focuses on the information highway and data transfer phenomenon, and could overlook the pivotal role of enduring relationships.
- b) While a longitudinal data collection approach with multiple leaders, projects, companies and industries surfaced rich data, consideration to the case method with 360 degree interviews could provide additional rich perspectives.
- c) Our data is based on a historical perspective of stories told and actions taken. It would be interesting to pursue an ethnographic approach to the conceptual model and see the leaders and organizations in action.

Based on the findings and implications developed from this specific analysis and synthesis of qualitative data, a revised conceptual model is shown in Figure 3.





Organizational culture has been removed as a moderator, as was the mediating effect of the development of networks for career benefit. Leader sponsorship and project outcome are now moderators. The extent to which social capital, as opposed to singularly social networks, is created or destroyed and the change leader identity shift become mediators, with our proposing the addition of change leader identity and experience base as independent variables to address potential limitations in our earlier approach to data collection. The dependent variables are proposed as opportunities inside the firm that surface for the leader following the project, and the leader's desire to accept.

Our future work will strive to continue to advance the change agency and social capital literature, with constructs integrated from social identity, organizational commitment, and role conflict theories. We have a particular interest in how change leaders balance the potential tension between their "outsidedness" and "insidedness", and how the organization and they personally view themselves, their identity, as a result.

## **CONCLUSION**

In summary, this qualitative study based on interviews with 30 change leaders of 42 radical change and continuous improvement projects within manufacturing companies has richly informed our understanding of the identity traits of change leaders and the interplay of social capital – more than social networks – sponsorship, and self identity in planned organizational change. Leading change can change leaders.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **Qualitative Interview Projects of Thirty Change Leaders**

#### **Radical Change**

Re-ramp from standstill to full rate production of a suite of complex military products in response to September 11, 2001, terrorist attack

Major Fortune 100 corporation acquisition, integration and site relocation to another state

Implementation of lean manufacturing techniques within a disparate system (same leader, two projects)

Turnaround of hostile external community relations with large overseas-based expatriate operation

Turnaround unit from last to first ranked for performance amongst over 50 worldwide operational teams, Teams operating in a high personal safety threat environment

Start-up of a new division for new market entry within a fast growing, high tech manufacturing firm

Turnaround of major appliance manufacturer in the midst of a field quality campaign and new technology market introduction (two leaders, two different, unconnected project vantage points)

Shut down/convert/relocate high volume, high technology manufacturing site, maintaining production rate

Program team leadership of alternative technology passenger car

Turnaround of US-Japanese automotive joint venture based in England

Create single contemporary supply chain management organization from tactically-focused buyer, supplier quality, product control and scheduling groups

Create cross-divisional strategic business unit within a large Fortune 100 firm to capture new growth opportunities

Redirect and expand retiring business segment towards high performance and new growth opportunities

Introduce global marketing campaign to shift internal and external perceptions of the firm

Concept-to-market of new technology product for high volume customer from a non-traditional supplier

Culture shift of large R&D organization to product and process accountability and market orientation

Innovative restructuring of major financial services provider amidst upheaval of mutual funds industry

Turnaround of high technology manufacturing firm via leadership reconstitution and HR department engagement at the strategic level

Turnaround of bankrupt multinational mining company and transformation of corporate culture from hierarchical and autocratic to inventive and participative

Introduction of untraditional team-based collaboration in high-stress, fast-paced environment

Field recall and reconstitution and institutionalization of standard procedures for software-based product

Implementation of racial and sexual harassment investigation process during time of workforce distress

#### **Continuous Improvement**

Culture change of large new product development program from autocratic to participative, team based, open collaboration with customer and partnered suppliers

Implementation of workforce diversity strategy in traditional multinational firm

Increase performance (delivery, cost, quality, customer satisfaction) of large production and new product development organization

Develop/implement enterprise-wide Six Sigma continuous improvement program (two leaders/two firms)

Implement open team concept in traditional manufacturing processing and product distribution factory

Reduce labor grievances and increase worker output (same leader, two separate companies)

Implement internal financial controls systems across five large automotive manufacturing plants

Introduce enterprise-wide, international optimization for large scale manufacturing equipment relocation

Leadership shift of 25-person engineering executive team from tactical to strategic focus

Implementation of enterprise resource planning system (one leader, two projects within the firm; second leader, different firm)

Development and deployment of metrics-based enterprise measurement and action system

Culture change within large scale program team through implementing organization development and leadership behavior change techniques

Overlay single program management organization across strong P&L-segmented enterprise

Post-acquisition introduction of blended new product development system into acquired company

**APPENDIX B**  
**60 to 90-MINUTE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL GUIDE**

**Change Leader Career Development: The Leveraging of Social Networks in  
Planned Organizational Change**

**Objectives**

1. To determine what criteria change leaders use to define the success of a planned organizational change project and the success of the leader of the project.
2. To explore the different processes and factors that contribute to a successful change project outcome and the success of the change leader, with a specific interest in the extent to which change leaders leverage and/or create and leverage internal and/or external networks when leading change. Are there instances when a change leader chooses to lead change without networks?
3. To understand how change leaders of different career backgrounds (originating from inside of the affected unit or outside) describe their networks. Do they develop/ leverage networks in different ways and to different extents when leading change? Does the change leader's sponsorship affects his managing the change project, in particular if it influences developing/leveraging of networks?
4. To study if the post-change project career development interest of the change leader influences how he leads change, in particular the extent to which he leverages networks in the process. Does he develop networks different and unique from those used to lead change to assist in his own career development?
5. To understand if change leaders of radical organizational change and leaders of continuous improvement initiatives place different importance on the leveraging of social networks to get to successful project outcomes, and the development of their own careers.
6. To determine what if any attributes of organizational culture differentiate the extent to which a change leader leverages networks for successful project outcome and personal career development.

**Review of Informed Consent Document**

The informed consent document will be reviewed and discussed with each participant prior to the commencement of the interview. It will have been sent in advance by email at least one week prior to the scheduled interview. Any objections or questions by participants relative to the interview process will be addressed. The interview will not begin until the participant's concerns have been appropriately addressed and he signs the informed consent document.

Any subject unable to participate in face-to-face meeting but wishing to engage in a telephone interview will be given the ICD via email one week prior to the interview. The investigators' contact information is included, in the event the subject has questions ahead of time. He will be asked to provide an informed consent at the onset of the telephone call, with a verbal response to the question:

“At this time, I would like you to respond verbally, with a yes or no answer, to the following questions: Are you over 18 years of age? Do you

understand the information provided to you? Do you consent to participate in this research?"

If the participant verbally responds that they do not want a written copy of the informed consent document, but have given verbal consent to participate, the interview process may begin.

"Before we begin the interview, I would like to remind you again that your participation is voluntary, and you may end this interview at any time. All information that you disclose to me during this interview will remain confidential and will not be shared with any of your subordinates, peers or superiors. In any type of report we might publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you or your organization."

The following phrase will be used to ensure that the participant is aware that the interview is being audio taped.

"I mention to you again that you have agreed to be audio taped during this interview, and I plan to make period notes to be able to refer back to when analyzing our conversation. And further I would like to remind you that during the course of the interview, you can and may change your mind and ask that the tape recorder be turned off at any time. I will immediately honor such a request.

### **Interview Protocol**

Subject ID# \_\_\_\_\_

#### *Introductory Questions*

This section ensures that the reasons for the study and the purpose of this interview are re-communicated, covering the same key points that were included in the recruitment process. This section is to gather information about the individual, their experience, and their role in the organization. However, prior to asking the question, it would be useful to provide information on how the subject was selected.

"During our preliminary telephone call OR per my introductory letter/email message, I had asked you to think in advance about change projects you have been involved in, perhaps one that was a radical departure from the previous state, such as a merger, acquisition, reorganization, restructuring, plant relocation or implementation of a major new technology system such as a new enterprise resource planning system, or substantially different way of doing business (collaborative teaming vs. functional orientation). Or a major continuous improvement projects you have led to carefully refine existing procedures or business practices to improve such performance attributes as cost, quality or speed. Both types of change projects should be viewed as complex, having tested your leadership skills and considered critical to the company's future. We may have enough time to speak to a couple of projects.

While I will be following a general list of questions to insure we stay as close as possible to the ninety minute timeframe, I am keenly interested in our keeping open to sharing general reflections and insights around leading change. Let's not let this list of questions be directing or constraining, but more guiding for our conversation.

<If the interviewee is not familiar with my background/current status> Before we begin, I wanted to make mention of my own frame of reference and interest in change leadership. In addition to my being an EDM student at Case Western Reserve University, I am currently Director of Enterprise Effectiveness at Raytheon Missile Systems in Tucson. We are in the midst of a major shift of our industry due to dramatic changes in the global war theater, moving towards systems solutions and making the missile a "node on the net" for information, not just protective capability. My role is to bring speed and affordability into our internal systems, in particular the product development process, and this assignment while quite like most of my major career assignments to lead radical or continuous change, it is by far the most complex and multi-faceted. Our company is the result of five companies merging over the past ten years, and as an executive newcomer, I am keenly aware of the role of social networks that exist within and between the seven major business sectors. So, the subject of our conversation is highly relevant to me on a personal basis, and I am looking forward to our learning together.

Do you have any questions before we begin?"

### **Change Leader and Project Introduction**

#### **1. Could you share briefly with me your career background prior to our discussing your story around leading change? How long had you been with this firm or unit?**

##### **Probes:**

- a) Types of organizations worked within: size, geographic centralization or dispersion, organizational structure, merger, acquisition, partner, JV
- b) Characterization of the industry: traditional manufacturing/service, degree/level of innovation, complexity and rate/state of change or evolution
- c) Roles held within: line, staff, teams, functional, program management, internal focused/external focused
- d) Traditional or non-traditional career path and/or special assignments
- e) How did you come to having expertise in leading change? Have you done this a lot?

#### **2. Could you describe in detail the project and how you fulfilled the role you were expected to play?**

##### **Probes:**

- a) Establishing a sense of urgency; point of departure from the past and present, dealing with resistance and issues of trust, getting and keeping alignment
- b) Creating a guiding coalition; position power, expertise, credibility, leadership
- c) Developing a vision and a strategy; moving to a plan; ideas, leveraging networks
- d) Communication strategy, practices, tactics; leveraging of networks; sponsorship
- e) Empowering and engaging employees for action; getting the right players on the bus; developing/clarifying roles and responsibilities; selecting/adding resources
- f) Generating short term wins and celebrating
- g) Consolidating gains and anchoring approaches in the culture; sustainability
- h) Changing the change

i) Overall style or approach: Lead from “in front” or “from behind”/autocratic tops down vs. enabling; doing something “to” targets vs. “with/for” colleagues

**3. How was it you came to taking the assignment we are about to talk about? What was the official or common name utilized for your role?**

Probes:

- a) Volunteer, competed for, requested, required (no choice)
- b) Role of a mentor or sponsor, peer/network encouragement
- c) Personal motivations – learning, experimenting, are you a “change agent”

**Questions Regarding the Dependent Variables**

**4. What do you feel were the ultimate outcomes and impact of this project? Was it successful in the eyes of the organization? How so?**

Probes:

- a) What type of results, sustainable/scalable/replicable or point specific occurred
- b) Learning and knowledge transfer
- c) Team rewarded and recognized, cited as best practice by others
- d) Neutral or negative consequences

**5. Were YOU successful?**

Probes:

- a) On yours or others’ terms?
- b) Your feelings about the organization and yourself? Insider/outsider shift?
- c) Changes in networks?
- d) Recognition/reward
- e) Personal development and learning/knowledge acquisition for future moves

**Questions Regarding the Moderating Variables**

**6. I’d like to understand more about the environment within which you led change. Describe the organizational culture in which you led the change project.**

Probes:

- a) Hierarchical, structured and control orientation vs. Collaborative, flexible and boundaryless (or dimensions respondent chooses to use)
- b) Internal vs. external orientation
- c) Closed or open networks; subtle, informal or obvious; role of politics

**7. Was the project considered a radical or a continuous improvement initiative, per how we earlier differentiated the two? Or some blend/other words you would choose to characterize?**

Probes:

- a) Duration of the project, role of time/sense of urgency
- b) Size of project (dollars, scope, number of people/departments affected)
- c) Visibility (one of many similar projects, part of a bigger agenda of change)
- d) New project or repeat/variation on a prior one
- e) Free-standing project or degree of connectivity to/integration with other projects
- e) Initial understanding of degree of difficulty, potential resistance, challenges/roadblocks

## Questions Regarding the Mediating Variables

### **8. Were there key players, special people or groups of people you relied upon?**

Probes:

- a) For ideas, feedback, coaching, support and collaboration
- b) Routinely and/or occasionally replied upon
- c) For resources and special insights
- d) One particular person who was a key guardian angel throughout for “protection” and roadblock removal

### **9. Did you go out and either expand or develop new associations during the change process? If so, how?**

Probes:

- a) Internal contacts and/or external contacts
- b) Role of a strategic partner to sponsor into other networks
- c) Techniques and best practices; what worked and what did not work

### **10. In general, have you kept in touch with former colleagues inside and outside the departments and firms you have been a part of over the years?**

Probes:

- a) What do your networks look like -- internal department ties, cross-department associations, external relationships, friendships
- b) Sources of information/insight/“intelligence”, interactions with suppliers, customers, partners/joint venture colleagues, competitors
- c) Industry associations or technical society memberships and committees
- d) University and non-profit associations
- e) Former employer or former industry connections
- f) In general, frequency of use and sense of time invested to maintain networks

### **11. Prior or during this project were you thinking about your own development and future career opportunities? Did things happen that caused you to change how you were leading the endeavor?**

Probes:

- a) Did the role have a deliberate “fit” in your career plan or consistent with the type of leadership assignments you enjoy/are selected for?
- b) Did you have a goal in mind or was there any indication of what you would do/be a candidate for post the project?
- c) Role of sponsor, interactions with peers/other actors as could relate to developing specific career-enhancing networks
- d) Dealing with resistance and negative outcomes on some players

### **12. What was your next assignment after this major project, and could you describe the process of how you and others orchestrated this move?**

Probes:

- a) Role of sponsor(s) or other network actors
- b) Advanced career, lateral move, derailed
- c) Logical or illogical process to you



Time permitting, return to Questions 2 through 12 (less 10), to discuss a second change project, (continuous improvement if first discussed a radical change project, radical if the first was continuous improvement). Repeat 6 if the change project was in a different organization.

**13. Based on our conversation of your two projects, what were the major differences and similarities between these experiences in the role you played?**

Probes:

- a) Employ different modus operandi depending upon the type of intervention to be successful
- b) Leverage different networks or networks in a different way
- c) Personal and career development

**Questions for Closure**

**14. Do you think because this was a radical change (or continuous improvement) project vs. the other type that you led it any differently?**

**15. Do you think the factors you discussed around culture played into how you led change?**

**16. If you had it to do all over again – lead the project(s) -- what would you do differently?**

Probes:

- a) Any mechanisms/factors that surface as critical that were not discussed
- b) Advice you would give to other change leaders?

**17. In summary, did leading this project(s) reshape you in any significant way?**

Probes:

- a) Style
- b) Career trajectory
- c) Network connections

**18. Was there anything about leading your change projects(s) that you would like to add or you wish we had gotten into?**

I want to genuinely thank you for your time today and your willingness to speak frankly and openly about your experiences with leading change. Let me reconfirm as mentioned at the onset, our conversation and any data discerned from it will remain confidential. It has been a great learning experience for me, and as I review my notes and the audio tape of our conversation, I may have some additional questions. With your permission I would like to contact you again if any additional questions do come up. Realizing that you and I went over a lot of information today, if you think of something later that you feel would be important for me to know, please don't hesitate to contact me.

**APPENDIX C**

**Organizational Culture, Project and Change Leader  
Outcome Tree for Thirty Qualitative Interviews**

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Culture	Heirarchical/Structured 28				Collaborative/Open 14				
	Radical 16		Cont Impvt 12		Radical 8		Cont Impvt 6		
Project	Succ 14	UnS/N 2	Succ 8	UnS/N 4	Succ 8	UnS/N 0	Succ 4	UnS/N 2	
Leader	S 11	U 3	S 7	U 1	S 4	U 4	S 3	U 1	
		S 0	U 2	S 2	U 2	S 0	U 0	S 1	U 1

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**Note:** Successful Change Leader: Insider’s career progresses within the firm, Outsider becomes Insider and progresses within the firm.  
 Unsuccessful Change Leader: Insider’s career stymied or becomes Outsider, Outsider stays “outside” and leaves the firm.

## APPENDIX D

### Table 2 Change Leader Identity Topology

		Before:	Insider to	Insider to	Outsider	Outsider	
		After:	Insider	Outsider	to Insider	Stay Out	Total
			15	4	6	8	33
<b>Beliefs</b>	Doing what is right		15	4	6	8	33
	Change is positive		13	4	5	8	30
	Change is a way of life		8	3	4	8	23
	Transform		12	4	4	6	26
	Will to succeed		12	4	6	7	29
	End justifies means		4	3	0	1	8
<b>Values and Guiding Principles</b>	Commitment/Loyalty		15	4	6	8	33
	Personal accountability		15	4	6	8	33
	High standards		13	4	6	8	31
	Future focus		13	4	6	8	31
	Push change (command)		3	3	1	1	8
	Pull change (enable)		11	2	5	7	27
	Owner operator/Autonomy		5	2	2	2	11
	Change team		10	3	5	6	24
	Teacher		8	3	4	7	22
	Develop others		8	3	4	5	20
Learning		12	4	5	6	27	
<b>Motivation</b>	Challenge		15	4	6	8	33
	Unknown/pioneer		10	4	5	8	27
	Excitement		10	4	5	7	26
	Fun		7	3	4	4	18
	Big impact		15	4	6	8	33
	Fulfillment		12	4	6	7	29
	Altruism		6	2	3	2	13
<b>Behaviors</b>	Entrepreneurial		11	4	6	6	28
	Enterprising		15	4	6	8	23
	Maverik		4	4	4	4	16
	Risk taker		8	4	6	7	25
	Prone to action		13	4	6	8	31
	Personal sacrifice		7	3	4	7	21
<b>Attributes</b>	Enthusiastic		15	4	6	8	33
	Inspirational		10	3	5	4	22
	Communication skills		15	4	6	8	33
	Decisive/Confident		13	4	6	7	30
	Persistent/Assertive		13	4	6	8	31
	Self-sufficiency		3	3	1	3	10
	People astute		12	4	6	6	29
Self-awareness		7	3	4	3	17	

Note: 30 Change Leaders with three discussing Insider and Outside projects