The Effects of Radical Transformational Change on the Change Agent in Software and Systems Product Development Contexts

Bob Schatz

Thomas Jefferson University, robert.schatz@jefferson.edu

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The Effects of Radical Transformational Change on the Change Agent in Software and Systems Product Development Contexts

by

Bob Schatz

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Management in Strategic Leadership

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Doctoral Committee Approval:

Larry M. Starr, Committee Chair
Matt Minahan, Ed. D.
Matthew Minahan, Committee Member, Reader
Dr. Richard Dool
Richard Dool, Committee Member, External Reader
ABSTRACT

THE EFFECTS OF RADICAL TRANSFORMATIONAL CHANGE ON THE CHANGE AGENT IN SOFTWARE AND SYSTEMS PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT CONTEXTS

Bob Schatz
Thomas Jefferson University 2019

We are at the cusp of what Ray Kurzweil, Google’s director of engineering, called the “age of acceleration,” where globalization, technology, and financial markets instill a need for newer, better, faster products and services (Friedman, 2016: 187). As old ways of operating become outmoded and exponential growth is expected, businesses struggle to keep pace. Many face the same imperative: adapt or die. They must make sweeping, radical organizational change led by prepared, capable leaders who are empowered to drive this transformation. Research on leading radical change initiatives has focused on systems, models, and methodology—the practical processes of taking a business from one means of production or distribution to another. However, researchers have neglected to study the personal impact that leading radical change has on leaders. Leaders who choose to take on the role of radical transformational change agent are poorly understood and supported; neither organizations nor change agents are fully aware of their responsibilities, realities, and risks.

To examine the lived experiences of people who have led cutting-edge organizational changes, I investigated the factors that trigger a “go” moment in leaders who initiate radical organizational change, the risks change agents perceive when entering an engagement, and the resulting personal and professional impacts. Qualitative analysis of the results of targeted surveys and follow-up interviews with people who had led radical change, along with close readings of the existing literature, revealed that change agents act for largely altruistic
reasons. They are driven to help organizations achieve greater success by factors including personal history and situational awareness, but they do so with only partial understanding of the great personal and professional risks involved. Change agents sacrifice job security and reputational standing by choosing to fight the status quo and absorb employee pushback. They also experience financial uncertainty—whether they succeed or not, they are soon out of a job—and they are left to deal with personal relationship challenges stemming from carrying home the stress of their work. By understanding what change agents experience before, during, and after radical change, people deciding whether to lead change can better understand what they are getting into, and organizations can better support change leaders to deliver results.
DEDICATION

In memory of my father-in-law, Dr. Jay Lipsitz (1934–2018), who, over the course of my doctoral studies, fought a terrible disease with incredible courage. Despite his medical issues, he never stopped encouraging me to keep going. He was very happy to hear that the first full draft of this dissertation was completed days before he passed. His legacy will live in my family forever. It’s finished, Boss!
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without question, my family has been my primary source of strength in my academic journey. It was a tremendous burden to place on them, and even when they questioned why I would want to subject myself to such pain, they inherently understood the need for me to complete this mission. Having a wife, children, and grandchildren all supporting me while I selfishly pursued a doctorate has been a humbling experience. My children—all working professionals themselves—and my grandchildren honored me by using this as an example that learning never stops at any age. My grandchildren could see Poppy doing his “homework” in what seemed like every free moment. Thank you, Sheri, DJ, Stephanie, Melanie, Eric, Derek, Alex, Brayden, Harper, Kayla, and our newest addition, Nicholas. Without you, this means nothing. Having their love and support through radical change and crazy academic pursuits has filled my life with pure joy.

I am grateful for knowing Dr. Larry Starr, who in his own right is a radical transformational change agent. He has pursued this dream of a doctoral program since his days at the University of Pennsylvania as director of the Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics program. I was the first person in the first cohort to apply to the new doctoral program at Philadelphia University, which subsequently merged with and became Thomas Jefferson University, and he has continued to be a source of wisdom and guidance since my time with him at Penn completing my master’s thesis.

I would also like to thank the faculty in the Doctor of Management in Strategic Leadership program. They are all special people who share a vision for a new type of program to develop leaders and leadership for generations to follow. Professors John Pourdehnad, Joseph Sweeney, Steve Freeman, Tom Guggino, and Matt Minahan all had a profound impact on my ability to complete this research. Dr. Les Sztandera was also a big
help, not only to me but also to my son Derek, who started and completed his MBA at Philadelphia University during the same period (which meant my son and I were his students at the same time). I would also like to recognize professors who helped raise my curiosity about my dissertation topic during my master’s work at University of Pennsylvania: Professors Ginny Vanderslice, John Eldred, Martin Stankard, Alan Barstow, and the late Eric C. van Merkensteijn.

I would like to thank the participants, who provided invaluable insights into key areas of their careers and personal lives. They held nothing back and had to dig deep in their thinking for self-analysis. Not only did it help shape this study, but it also helped us identify a strong connection through transformative power. I cannot wait to share this with them.

My cohort, Cohort 1, has been amazing in supporting each other through our individual journeys. We entered an academic start-up and faced all the first-time challenges to make the program a success. Whenever writing the next word became a burden or one of us was ready to throw in the towel, someone from the cohort would be there to pick him or her up. Thanks to all of you: Derek Hunsberger, Tina Wiltsee, Adena Johnston, Guy Thigpen, Michelle Capobianchi, Michael Asada, and Father Al Bradley.

Dr. Rick Dool also deserves much thanks for what he has done for me in my career. I worked for Rick as an executive for several years when he was a CEO. He instilled in me the discipline to learn and become a more effective leader and teacher. A fellow GE veteran, he helped remind me about the GE Way—the importance of developing your people and continuing to develop yourself as a means of doing so.

Many thanks to all the people whom I have had the honor to lead in organizations for the past 35 years. They were all on the front lines of big changes, and I hope they have learned as much from me as I have learned from them. For the past 12 years, my clients have
entrusted me with helping them in their own transformation, and their courage continues to inspire me to keep learning so that I can stay ahead of them and keep them on the right path.

Finally, I would like to recognize two people who fundamentally changed the way I view the profession of software development: Ken Schwaber, one of the founders of Scrum, an agile product development approach, and Bob Martin, hands down the best software mind I have ever encountered and a leader in the revolution to change the software profession. Both of these troublemakers have had a profound impact on me and in 2003–2004 helped form what would become the biggest, most challenging personal, professional, and career change I would ever encounter. They mentored and coached me, challenged me, pushed me, and inspired me to be a soldier in the war to change the software development industry. Their influence has been permanently stamped in my being. Today, because of these battles, agile development practices are quickly becoming the de facto standard in technology product development.
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In this dissertation, I define and examine the characteristics of radical transformational change (RTC), with a focus on the implications and effects of the experience on the leader (the change agent). I present a framework of contextual conditions for leaders who have decided to lead RTC, the characteristics of the people who decide to take on such responsibility, and the reasons why they choose to do so. As organizational transformation is a distinctive kind of change, which, I argue, requires special leadership characteristics (De Smet & Gagnon, 2018; Heifetz, Grashow, & Linsky, 2009; Heifetz & Laurie, 1997; Isern & Pung, 2007; Pascale, 1999), the primary purpose of this dissertation was to examine the phenomenon of the lived experiences of leaders who have led radical change in their organizations.

Given the complex nature of change endeavors and how often such initiatives fail, I suggest the necessary and sufficient conditions that must exist for an effective RTC. The questions to be answered included the following: What can an organization do to create, manage, and support initiatives for these change agents? Can change agents gain a better understanding of what they should consider before they decide to face such a challenge? What pressures do change agents face at home, at work, and within themselves because of this experience?

For the purposes of this study, “complex” initiatives, according to Remington (2016: 25), are defined as having abnormally high levels of uncertainty, ambiguity, and associated reactions, such as decreasing levels of trust. This may be due in part to some of the following conditions:

- Highly networked, interdependent, and codependent tasks
- Complicated and interdependent communication pathways, and diffuse or conflicting authority
- High levels of technical uncertainty, where solutions may not yet exist
- Disparate groups of stakeholders with competing agendas that are difficult to understand, track, and manage
- Different work or national cultures involved
- Lack of clarity on vision and outcome goals
- External environmental, political, regulatory, technical, or organizational changes that are unpredictable
- Time-related pressures
- Unexpected emergent behavior resulting in rapidly escalating risks concerning small events that may have previously been considered unrelated

This definition is also consistent with content found on the website for the International Centre for Complex Project Management (ICCPM, n.d.).

According to Snowden and Boone (2007), complex systems involving humans differ from complex systems in nature, which are often applied as examples to industrial modeling and production. Complex systems involving humans behave in different ways because humans are unpredictable and they use intellect. Snowden and Boone pointed out that humans have multiple identities, make decisions based on past patterns of success and failure, and can purposefully change a system. This highlights how important it is for leaders to think and act differently if they want to apply complexity science to their organizational challenges.

This document is presented in the following sequence. Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the topic, including the background of the challenge that organizations face as
they deal with volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous (VUCA) environments, to which they must constantly adapt or face the consequences of being unable to serve their customers. A review of major shifts that have occurred since the end of World War II provides some context for the challenges organizations face in both the private and public sectors. Then, a case is presented for the importance of transformational change and how developing that skill is critical for companies in today’s environment. Because changes happen at a faster pace and tend to be more impactful or radical than in the past, companies need change agents now more than ever. As the literature suggests, the responsibility for change no longer lies solely with heroic managers; rather it must be dispersed and driven down to the workers in a system. This background helps develop the research questions, which provide an understanding of how someone becomes an agent of change, as well as the impact, both positive and negative, on that person.

Chapter 2 is a literature review of transformation-related theories, models, and practices, with specific focus on transformational leadership. The literature review starts with an overview of the writing and research on the topic of RTC, as it is important to describe and define the scope of radical change, the conditions that precipitate the need for change of this kind, and the associated risks. Then I discuss the topic of transformational leadership, which is important to how leaders approach a radical change initiative. Finally, through a review of the literature on RTC agents, I identify what has been studied in terms of the decision-making process, the challenges in initiating change, and the post-change impact on those leaders.

In Chapter 3, I describe the research methodology used on this project. In this study, I used a combination of an online survey consisting of 10 open-ended questions about the lived experiences of people who have led major changes in organizations, along with follow-up
interviews with people who have initiated and led RTC in their organizations. Using a purposive sampling method, I sent requests to 25 people and received 19 responses. In addition, I administered the questions in an interview setting to 6 of these people to further explore their experiences. For this smaller population, I had firsthand knowledge of their journey. The primary change that this population had been involved in driving was the change to agile/lean project management approaches that began in the mid-1990s, the biggest change since the era of total quality management (TQM) in the 1980s and business process reengineering (BPR) in the 1990s. This change represents one of the software/systems development sector’s responses to dealing with complexity. I coded the data, which were long-form answers to questions and interview transcripts, to look for trends, themes, and commonalities among the participants. This phenomenological study was specifically designed to study the lived experiences of people and to aid in understanding the dynamics of RTC from the change agent’s perspective.

In Chapter 4, I present the findings from the collected data with narratives from the participants that helped formulate the patterns and themes described in Chapter 5, where I provide the conclusions, implications, and recommendations for further study drawn from the research questions and data collected. I compare the findings to those in the literature and match them to the conceptual findings of this study. In addition, I present the practical implications for professional practice, along with recommendations for further research.

**Background**

Organizations are struggling to increase business agility—their ability to quickly respond to change; adapt products, services, and processes; and potentially reconfigure themselves to meet customer demands (Friedman, 2016; Hugos, 2009; Kotter, 2014). They may find that once-infrequent radical changes have become more common, pushing the
organization into a state of constant flux that borders on chaos. In preparation for this future, the demand for change agents will likely increase. However, the current risks ensure that the supply will fall far short of demand. This is significant because without change agents stepping forward, organizations will be unable to meet the demands of stakeholders.

I argue that an RTC process is needed to help organizations survive in some contexts and that transformational leaders must bring people through change (Chou, 2014). Covey (1992: 287) supported this idea:

The goal of transformational leadership is to “transform” people and organizations in a literal sense—to change them in mind and heart; enlarge vision, insight, and understanding; clarify purposes; make behavior congruent with beliefs, principles, or values; and bring about changes that are permanent, self-perpetuating, and momentum building.

A leader’s decision to initiate change, and the outcomes that result, can have both positive and negative impacts on their personal and professional lives. Knowing more about these triggers and effects could help prepare more change agents and provide organizations with the ability to continually adapt to today’s fast-changing, complex, high-speed VUCA environments (Stiehm & Townsend, 2002; Stuart, 1995). Buchanan, Claydon, and Doyle (1999) and Doyle (2000) pointed out that although the change agent role is viewed as critical for success, little has been done to create competency in the role. It has not been well defined, developed, supported, recognized, or rewarded. Nearly two decades into the VUCA era, the situation remains largely unchanged; however, change agency is more dispersed, meaning it no longer comes down from senior leaders at the top (Caldwell, 2001). Further, changes are becoming more frequent and radical in terms of their impact.

There are few studies of the motivations of change agents, particularly in RTC. There are even fewer studies of the impact on people who decide to take on this type of change and almost no studies on change agents’ personal perspectives on why they decided to lead
change and how they were treated in and out of the work environment (Buchanan, 2003; Buchanan et al., 1999; Caldwell, 2003). The study of change from the change agent’s viewpoint is necessary considering the environment in which organizations operate today (i.e., VUCA), where the rules and norms of the past no longer create results that organizations and their consumers desire.

The term “VUCA” was originally used by the U.S. Army War College (Stiehm & Townsend, 2002) to describe the post–Cold War global environment. VUCA has been applied to organizational survival (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), which depends on the ability to adapt and grow to meet the needs of consumers. The methods and models for change have long been described and argued, and the techniques, mechanisms, and strategies of change have been widely covered in the literature. Rarely addressed are the characteristics and capacities of people who initiate or lead change, the characteristics that drive people to attempt this in the face of significant risk, and what happens in response to the change effort.

In *The Prince* (1532; 1908 translation by Marriott), Niccolo Machiavelli noted some of these characteristics:

> And let it be noted that there is no more delicate matter to take in hand, nor more dangerous to conduct, nor more doubtful in its success, than to set up as a leader in the introduction of changes. For he who innovates will have for his enemies all those who are well off under the existing order of things, and only the lukewarm supporters in those who might be better off under the new. This lukewarm temper arises partly from the fear of adversaries who have the laws on their side and partly from the incredulity of mankind, who will never admit the merit of anything new, until they have seen it proved by the event. (Machiavelli, 1908: 21)

If researchers can better understand the motivations of and reactions to change agents during times of significant change, then they can create a system that supports and encourages these agents to provide more change leadership in organizations.
For these reasons, an exploration of the motivations, decision-making, risks, and impacts of RTC agents can help identify, support, and position these people to successfully accomplish their mission to lead RTC (Buchanan et al., 1999; Chrusciel, 2007). The results may help raise awareness of the demands placed on people who step into a change agent role, so that those considering entering such a role know what to expect and can prepare themselves on a personal and professional level (Doyle, 2002). Organizations may be able to develop coaching and support systems for these people to meet the demand to recruit, train, and deploy these change agents when these events occur (Buchanan & Boddy, 1992; Buchanan & Storey, 1997; Doyle, 2000, 2001, 2002; Howell & Higgins, 1990).

**A Brief History of Change Leadership**

Pascale (1999) pointed out that every decade or two for the past 100 years, management thinking has gone through a significant change. These phases are similar to the popular S-curve model (introduction, acceleration, acceptance, maturity) of technology and product adoption described in *Diffusion of Innovations* (Rogers, 1995). After World War II, there was a strategic focus period as war planners applied their experiences to the corporate world. By the 1970s, strategic tools such as Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats (SWOT) analysis (Helms & Nixon, 2010), the Five Forces framework (Porter, 1979), experience curves, strategic portfolios, and competitive strategy were being used by an army of consultants positioned to drive companies to adopt these techniques. The strategy seemed to be working until companies like Nokia, Dell, Amazon, and CNN rose to prominence using innovative business models that flew in the face of established methods of strategic thinking.

The 1980s and 1990s also gave rise to the performance improvement era, which stemmed from the post–World War II rebuilding efforts in Japan that began in the late 1940s. Once Japanese automobile producers such as Toyota, Honda, and Datsun (now Nissan) and
electronics manufacturers such as Sony and Panasonic began seriously obtaining market share from major American companies, organizations began adopting the “Japanese way.” The Japanese innovated by combining the mass production techniques they had learned mainly from Ford Motor Company, the just-in-time supply chain that they learned from U.S. supermarkets, and the continuous improvement/statistical process control techniques they had learned from W. Edwards Deming (Gabor, 1990). Utilizing Deming’s teachings, mass production techniques, and the supermarket supply model, Japanese companies created corporate innovations such as the Toyota Production System (Deming, 2000; Womack, Jones, & Roos, 1990). When the realization hit that these continuous improvement and statistical process control approaches were the way to compete in a global environment, manufacturing supply chain and services companies were again faced with an adapt-or-die situation. Companies were introduced to TQM (Ishikawa, 1985), Kaizen, just-in-time (Womack et al., 1990), and BPR (Hammer, 1990). These techniques required very different approaches in thought and action.

Bass (1999) noted that the end of the Cold War in 1989 signaled a need for flexibility in employees, teams, and organizations. He identified how organizations flattened, and cross-functional teams aligned to business processes and customer needs seemed to be a better path to follow than the departmental silo hierarchy. In this type of environment, a leadership style that fosters autonomy and challenging work became an important component of job satisfaction (Bass, 1999).

At the turn of the 21st century, a new era began as the Internet allowed companies and people to connect, share information, and conduct business much more easily across borders. A massive innovation period known as the dot-com era took place from 1994 to 2000 (Lowenstein, 2004) as communication networks and computers rapidly spread to
businesses and homes, and later, through the innovation of mobile devices, the Internet reached the hands of about two-thirds of people on the planet (Hollander, 2017). Pascale (1999: 84) described the beginning of this new era:

> Organizations cannot win by cost reduction alone and cannot invent appropriate strategic responses fast enough to stay abreast of nimble rivals. Many are exhausted by the pace of change, and their harried attempts to execute new initiatives fall short of expectations.

Pascale contended that in this new era organizations became what Dooley, Johnson, and Bush (1995) called “complex adaptive systems.”

> Such organizational approaches, adapted from research on the behavior of living systems, allowed companies to improve the success of strategic initiatives and build a level of renewal necessary for successful execution. A complex adaptive system, according to Pascale (1999), must meet four criteria:

1. It must comprise many agents acting in parallel; it is not hierarchically controlled.
2. It must continuously shuffle these building blocks and generate multiple levels of organization and structure.
3. It must be subject to the second law of thermodynamics, exhibiting entropy and winding down over time unless replenished with energy; thus, these systems are vulnerable to death.
4. It must have a capacity for pattern recognition and employ this to anticipate the future and learn to recognize the anticipation of seasonal change.

In describing today’s environment, Ray Kurzweil, director of engineering at Google, said,

> We’re entering an age of acceleration. The models underlying society at every level, which are largely based on a linear model of change, are going to have to be redefined. Because of the explosive power of exponential growth, the twenty-first century will be equivalent to 20,000 years of progress at today’s
rate of progress; organizations have to be able to redefine themselves at a faster and faster pace. (as cited in Friedman, 2016: 187)

Friedman (2016) identified three of the most powerful forces of acceleration: technology, globalization, and climate change. Along with Kotter (2014), Friedman described the accelerated pace and demand for change, citing data about the exponential rate of change across industries, such as the annual number of patent applications, the growth in computer hard drive storage, and the rate of change in shares traded on the New York Stock Exchange. These indicators demonstrate the challenges companies face as they try to remain competitive and grow. Huy (2002) identified that the competitive pressures caused by globalization, deregulation, and discontinuous technological changes have prompted organizations to consider radical changes in order to ensure organizational survival.

The major thrust of this growth began as the dot-com era produced technologies and platforms to support innovation, including the iPhone, Hadoop (big data), GitHub, Facebook (open to everyone), Twitter, Change.org, Android, Kindle, Airbnb, Palantir (analytics), and IBM Watson, as well as the beginning of a clean energy revolution. As organizations exploited these opportunities, they enjoyed many advances, technical availability, and new approaches. Now, technological advances, healthier people, the spread of literacy, the broader availability of information, and a booming global middle class are reshaping business environments (Greenberg, Hirt, & Smit, 2017). Friedman (2016) referred to the information supernova, or the release of energy created by the cloud, which is amplifying the power of machines, people, and the flow of ideas. According to De Smet and Gagnon (2018), digitization, advanced analytics, and artificial intelligence are sweeping across industries and geographies.

Johnson (2001) identified complexity as behavior characteristics of a system whose components interact in multiple ways and follow local rules with no reasonable patterns to
define the possible interactions. Since 2007, the accelerated advances that began taking shape in the mid-1990s, due in part to increasing access to computing power, have led to an easing of complexity even as the world has become more complex. The complex interactions that used to be part of everyday life have now become fast, free, easy, and invisible (Friedman, 2016). The ways in which we communicate, collaborate, shop, travel, consume, and learn have become simpler and easier for consumers, abstracting their complexity while significantly increasing the complexity behind the scenes. Johnson (2001) called this the nature of “emergence.”

In emergence, higher-level patterns arise from parallel complex interactions between local agents. Complex adaptive systems have a layered architecture, where the higher levels get their intelligence from below. Agents residing on one scale start producing behavior that lies one scale above. This acceleration, along with an increase in base-level complexities, has caused companies to be challenged as never before and has redefined the organizational imperative: adapt or die. This new era, known as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, or 4IR (Davis, 2016), has created a need for people who can help organizations develop agility in people, processes, and products in order to survive (Foster & Kaplan, 2001). To encourage, grow, and support these strategic leaders at all levels, organizations must have improved understanding of the personal experiences of people who have led these types of changes. As Buchanan (2003) argued, the typologies and competency characteristics tend to be post hoc rationalizations and do not necessarily reflect the personal process one goes through in deciding to lead a change, not to mention the consequences of those decisions.

**What Is Transformational Change?**

Transformational change is a change in the culture and strategy of the organization over a long period. Ashkenas (2015) distinguished between change and transformation:
Unlike change management, [transformation] doesn’t focus on a few discrete, well-defined shifts, but rather on a portfolio of initiatives, which are interdependent or intersecting. More importantly, the overall goal of transformation is not just to execute a defined change—but to reinvent the organization and discover a new or revised business model based on a vision for the future. It’s much more unpredictable, iterative, and experimental. It entails much higher risk. And even if successful change management leads to the execution of certain initiatives within the transformation portfolio, the overall transformation could still fail.

Transformational change is divergent change and fundamentally shifts processes, operations, organizational structure, values, and culture. It is different from convergent evolutionary change, which is more of a fine-tuning of an organization’s existing orientation (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Sometimes, VUCA conditions create a need to change at an accelerated pace, which would be considered radical change (Isern & Pung, 2007; Nadler, 1998; Tushman, Newman, & Romanelli, 1986). Kilmann and Covin (1988) referred to this type of change as “revolutionary.”

RTC concerns an abrupt, sudden change of the system as opposed to a change in the system. RTC often involves a redefined mission and core values, altered power and status, reorganization, revised interaction patterns, and new executives (often from the outside). Nadler (1998) called these types of changes “re-creations” and stated that they pose a very specific set of concerns and issues (described later in this dissertation) that “most managers want to avoid the costs and risks of” (Nadler, 1988: 73).

Efforts to manage within the VUCA environment have followed many recipe-driven, linear approaches for leading change that Collins (1998) referred to as “n-step guides.” These include the following:

- The classic Lewin (1951) three-step model of unfreezing, changing, and refreezing
- Ulrich’s (1998) seven-step guide
Kotter’s (1995, 2008, 2014) eight steps

The 14 steps suggested by Eccles (1994)

These models are often used to guide organizations as they implement large initiatives such as TQM, BPR, organizational development (OD), lean/agile approaches, and digital transformations. Buchanan (2003) noted that although these models recognize the roles of project leaders and change champions, only those written from the perspective of OD and change theory reference a change agent who may be external to the organization.

**Leadership Drives Change**

A multifaceted type of leadership is required to guide an organization that is in what might seem like a constant state of crisis. An approach that is more improvisational and experimental, and more art than science, seems to be the best path (Heifetz et al., 2009). Leading transformational change requires innovation, productivity improvements, integration of acquisitions (often on a global scale), strategic and cultural change, and growth. Snowden and Boone (2007) constructed the Cynefin framework (detailed in Chapter 2) as a tool for leaders to consider different responses after they have determined the type of context they find themselves dealing with. Transformational change is often stalled by a limited number of experienced change leaders, silo incremental improvement thinking, restrictive rules and procedures, pressure to meet short-term numbers, complacency, and insufficient buy-in (Kotter, 2014). Kotter (2014: 9) wrote, “People are often loath to take chances without permission from superiors. . . . People cling to their habits and fear loss of power and stature.” Strebel (1992) stated that guiding an organization through radical change with as little trauma as possible requires understanding the different rates at which change can occur in different dimensions, as in the case of changes in technology or world events that affect
the structure, strategy, and style leaders use to deal with radical change. He referred to this type of change as “breakpoint” conditions.

According to De Smet and Gagnon (2018), times of urgency and uncertainty require an emergent leadership model where leadership can come from anywhere, not just from people in roles of traditional hierarchical authority:

> Leaders should strive, instead, to empower the organization as a whole, to be felt but not seen, to be inspiring but not indispensable—and not to insist that everyone else should be just like them. Such leadership rests on the ability to adapt and on congruence with the essence of your organization. (De Smet & Gagnon, 2018: 9)

**The Risks of Leading Change**

Change is complex, iterative, and politicized (Buchanan, 2003). From this perspective, organizational change makes it necessary to consider how the context, substance, and process of change interact. This context includes factors such as the organization’s external environment, history, culture, structure, and goals; the timing and pacing of the change; the type, scale, and significance of the change; and the implementation process for the change. Morris (2012) noted that driving RTC challenges leaders to effectively balance the use of episodic and systemic power to create the best conditions for a radical change to be initiated and survive. Morris defined episodic power as change that is initiated by interested actors to establish early modifications to routines, whereas systemic power is the institutionalization of change by embedding it in practices, rules, and identities. Balancing the use of these two powers is an important ability leaders must continue to master as change becomes increasingly necessary.

Challenges of this magnitude mean dramatic shifts in products, processes, and people. The growth of cloud computing, a more mobile workforce, and the increasing importance of engaging employees and customers have pushed companies’ abilities to deal with a
continuously increasing rate of change. Following the beginning of the dot-com era in 1994, through the Y2K frenzy of 1999, the dot-com bubble burst in 2000, and the emergence of mobile devices in 2005, some organizations were able to change, some stumbled but survived, and many did not make it (Collins, 2001; Collins & Collins, 2009). This put a premium on the ability of organizations to make rapid, high-impact, transformational change, applying innovations in products, processes, and people at a much faster pace (Kotter, 2014).

Transformation becomes necessary when environmental conditions (economic, environmental, or world events) and the turbulence of frequent change create conditions such that current organizational practices no longer create value (Francis, Bessant, & Hobday, 2003; Nutt & Backoff, 1997). However, some suggest that rapid change can create the momentum to overcome the inertia of the status quo that builds up over time (Gersick, 1991; Miller, Friesen, & Mintzberg, 1984; Romanelli & Tushman, 1994). These types of changes are less frequent but highly impactful. Failure rates are high, and risks are extreme (Amis, Slack, & Hinings, 2004). Huy (2002: 61) stated, “Radical change is strategic because its outcome affects the life chances of the organization.”


By contrast, Jacquemont, Maor, and Reich (2015) published the results of a survey showing that 40% of executives reported their transformation efforts were completely or
mostly successful. Anthony and Schwartz (2017) found that many companies claimed to be transforming, but evidence showed that successful change efforts were rare. In their study of S&P 500 and Global 500 firms, they identified only 10 companies that seemed to meet the inclusion criteria for success: new growth, the ability for core repositioning (agility), and financial performance. The companies that stood out as transformational were Amazon, Netflix, Priceline, Apple, Aetna, Adobe, DaVita, Microsoft, Danone, and Thyssenkrupp. Short of conditions of catastrophic failure or tremendous opportunity, organizations are increasingly challenged to make radical transformational changes; however, identifying and supporting change agents to take on such tasks is difficult.

Pascale (1999) suggested that change agents often face the daunting task of driving change in a system that wants to remain in its current state. This state of stable equilibrium poses a constant danger to established, successful companies. Like all living systems, one of the survival mechanisms is variety. Applying a biological metaphor, Pascale (1999) suggested that in organizations, people are the “chromosomes” that create variety. Organizations create variety by hiring from the outside, getting leaders to interact with workers, and dealing with disgruntled customers or partners. The enemy of these methods is the existing social order, which, like the body’s immune defense system, seeks to neutralize, isolate, or destroy foreign invaders. These “antibodies” in the form of social norms, corporate values, and orthodox beliefs nullify the advantages of diversity.

As a caution to change agents hired from the outside, Watkins (2013: 27) stated, “Joining a new company is akin to an organ transplant—and you’re the new organ. If you’re not thoughtful in adapting to the new situation, you could end up being attacked by the organizational immune system and rejected.” Gilley, Godek, and Gilley (2009) developed this analogy by stating that an organization’s immune system protects against change by
erecting a powerful barrier of people, policies, procedures, and the culture of preventing change without respect to the consequences. Thus, employees view organizational change as a significant threat, and RTC increases the intensity of the rejection of change and anyone associated with leading it. As the level of change accelerates, organizations develop strategies to overcome this rejection. Using the practices of medical science, they conceal the change, modify behaviors so the change can be tolerated, and disarm the immune system.

**Research Questions**

There are three important questions that I attempted to answer in this study:

- What *factors* trigger a “go” moment in leaders who are initiating a radical change in an organization?

- What *risks* to themselves do change agents perceive in leading radical organizational change?

- What are the resulting personal and professional *impacts* on the change agent?

The answers to these questions provide an understanding of the considerations change agents make when they lead change that affects how organizations select, train, and support change agents. Examining these risks provides insight into what RTC looks like from the change agent’s perspective. Gaining insight into the perceived risks can also help prepare both the change agent and the organization for what they are about to experience in hopes that it might relieve some of the pain of RTC for everyone. Finally, highlighting the resulting impact on the change agent can help prepare and support change agents on both a personal and professional level. Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive review of the literature in the areas of organizational change, change agents, and transformation.
Author’s Note

I am passionate about this topic, as I have performed in the capacity of a change agent and have recognized patterns that were far outside the boundaries I had learned and practiced as a leader (Schatz & Abdelshafi, 2005, 2006). My own lived experiences cannot be ignored as a basis for the study and from a research perspective could introduce a bias. However, the chosen study type—a qualitative, phenomenological study—accepts this. Groenewald (2004) pointed out that researchers in this type of study cannot be detached from their own presuppositions and should not pretend to be. The researcher’s own experience is helpful in conducting the study. The aim of the researcher is to describe the social and psychological phenomenon from the perspective of the people who lived it. The facts are held in the participants’ thoughts and feelings about how they experienced the phenomenon.

In my current role, I serve as an outsider who infuses organizations with the urgency to change, and I work with insiders to lead them through RTC. When the change is a radical departure from the current way, it increases organizational resistance, and there is typically a pervasive lack of people with the willingness and courage to step up and take the change agent role as the insider. Having done this work for more than a decade, I have observed other people driving change and have watched and listened to their experiences, noting how similar they were to mine. This dissertation offers an opportunity to gain insight into the process of deciding to act or not to act—to lead change or to maintain the status quo. The collective experiences of the interview subjects, especially given the lack of study of change from the change agent perspective, make this topic rich ground to sow.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The focus of this literature review is on radical transformational change (RTC), which has a long-term impact on organizations and their people, specifically the people who act as RTC agents and leaders. In this chapter, I review the research on these topics, including the nature of transformational leadership, as well as the antecedent conditions and subsequent impacts on the those who lead RTC.

Through the research, I define RTC as a harsh, revolutionary, discontinuous reshaping of strategy, structure, people, and processes—a disruptive, paradigm-shifting innovation that challenges the core of an organization. RTC is not a planned change in which the organization, though evolving, operates in a frame it is used to. While an organization may be undergoing a major change, if the basic operating principle is still the same, it is not RTC. Therefore, in this study I primarily address sudden, spontaneous, radical change, though I describe it in the context of the full scope of transformational changes, including planned OD-led initiatives, to identify the specific environment in which RTC agents must operate.

Literature Review Table of Contents

Table 1 presents an overview of this chapter’s key findings and themes, along with the corresponding page number for each section.

The Study of Radical Transformational Change

Difficulty in studying radical transformational change. RTC, also called second-order change (Bartunek & Moch, 1987), is not well covered in the literature, which is understandable as its impact has been highlighted by increased pace and scope in recent years. Because RTC requires a shift in attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values, which Chapman
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(2002) stated is unavoidable in complex and turbulent environments, it may be that the current nature of change is not planned or pretty and seems to defy all planned models. Most academics’ views of change are based on planned change or a post-event evaluation of what an organization experienced during a specific event. But each event, and each radical change, has a wide array of variables. Huy, Corley, and Kraatz (2014) explained how difficult it is to research RTC, as researchers have focused on the initiation and early stages of radical change but not on the late stages and long-term adoption due to lack of access during implementation and longitudinal studies. This explains why the models are focused on strategy.


lineages exist in an essentially static form (equilibrium) over most of their histories, and new species arise abruptly, through sudden, revolutionary “punctuations” of rapid change (at which point as in the Darwinian model-environmental selection determines the fate of new variations).

Continuing this analogy from the domain of the sciences, Kuhn (1970) described the differences between normal science and scientific revolution. He defined the word paradigm as an “achievement that is sufficiently unprecedented to attract an enduring group of adherents away from competing modes of scientific activity and is sufficiently open-ended to leave all sorts of problems for the redefined group of practitioners to resolve” (Kuhn, 1970: 10). These paradigms set the stage for scientific research.

Kuhn (1970) described a paradigm shift as a change in fundamental scientific ideas and practices. A scientific revolution occurs when scientists encounter inconsistencies or anomalies in the currently accepted paradigm in which science normally operates. When there are significant anomalies regarding the current paradigm, a crisis emerges. This crisis in the scientific community starts a process of uncovering new ideas, which may have been
discarded previously, for new followers to try. At this point, the debate begins between the new followers and the old guard, which wants to protect the old paradigm. Once the new idea is tried—and once, as Kuhn says, the old guard eventually dies, a new paradigm is formed, and normal science can continue. Kuhn’s framework aligns with the dynamics of RTC, as it is a shift from current methods and thinking brought on by environmental conditions that challenge the existing paradigm. This leads to the conflict that change agents experience until the RTC becomes the new norm or paradigm.

Change management models. Kurt Lewin (1890–1947), a German American psychologist, is known as the “father” of change management theories, social psychology, group dynamics, and organization development. His simple three-step change model (unfreezing, changing, refreezing) has been the foundation of almost every popular change model since the late 1950s. Although this model is not widely recognized, Cummings, Bridgman, and Brown (2016) illustrated how it became popular after Lewin’s passing. Moreover, they argued, he never actually developed such a model; rather, a strong need developed for a simple change model, particularly during the 1980s when companies and big consulting organizations, facing intense pressure to battle the decline of U.S. industry and fear over the rising competition of Japanese manufacturing, sought a “catchy” way to drive change in companies so they could rise above these challenges. With that as a background, OD consultants and change agents used this simple three-step change model to develop planned change programs. This was seen as more consumable for management. Cummings et al. (2016: 44) called it “pop-management.”

There are many variations derived from Lewin, including the approach taken by Nadler and Tushman (1989), who highlighted that organizations are in a constant state of change. The nature, scope, type, and intensity of change varies, and different changes require
different approaches for leadership behavior in initiation, energizing, and implementation (Nadler & Tushman, 1990: 79). Their model proposes a matrix with two dimensions and four change categories (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Types of Organizational Change**

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<th>Incremental</th>
<th>Strategic</th>
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<td>Anticipatory</td>
<td>Tuning</td>
<td>Reorientation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reactive</td>
<td>Adaptation</td>
<td>Re-creation</td>
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In this model, Nadler and Tushman (1989, 1990) identified two dimensions of change. In the first dimension, change may be incremental or strategic. Incremental changes happen all the time. They can be big or small, and they affect selected parts of the organization or process with the goal of improving the effectiveness of the organization while maintaining the general strategy, structure, and values already in place. Strategic changes, by contrast, impact the whole system. They fundamentally redefine frameworks, strategy, structure, people, processes, and maybe even core values. Strategic changes are directed to help the organization adopt a completely new configuration in response to critical stimuli. These changes are made within the context or frame of the organization, a frame being a mental model or set of assumptions that allows for rapid cognition (Gladwell, 2013); they do not involve changes to culture, values, or basic business function. Strategic changes reshape, bend, or, in the case of radical change, break the frame.
The second dimension of the model concerns changes that are anticipatory or reactive. Changes that are driven by an external event or condition and forced on the organization are categorized as reactive. When a change is not immediately needed to respond to an external event but management believes that change in anticipation of events to come will provide a competitive advantage, it is classified as anticipatory (Nadler & Tushman, 1990: 79).

This model creates a typology of four classes of change. “Tuning” is incremental change made in anticipation of future events. It may be done to increase efficiency of an existing process or unit but is not a response to an immediate problem. “Adaptation” is incremental change made in response to external events. This type of change is prompted by competition, market shift, or a technology change. It requires a response but can be done without major organizational restructuring. “Reorientation” is strategic change done with the availability of time to plan for an anticipated external event. This type of change forces significant organizational upheaval but remains within the domain of values, behaviors, and structure, though directed in a significantly different direction. This is referred to as “frame-bending” change. “Re-creation” is strategic change that threatens the organization’s existence with no real time to plan. This is the most radical form of reorientation, called “frame-breaking” change. These types of changes require a radical change from the past, including changes in leadership, values, strategy, culture, structure, processes, products, customers, markets, and more.

Nadler and Tushman (1989) suggested that these changes have increasing levels of intensity that can affect the organization. Figure 2 illustrates the relative intensity of the four types of change. Most of Nadler and Tushman’s work focuses on leadership in reorientations. In the context of re-creations, they stated, “Re-creations are the most risky and traumatic...
Figure 2: Relative Intensity of Different Types of Change


form of change, and our assumption is that managers would rather avoid the costs and risks associated with them” (Nadler & Tushman, 1989: 197). That is a good indication of where the demand for research was in the 1980s for companies that needed to go through major strategic anticipatory change.

RTC is aligned with the highest-intensity change, which Nadler and Tushman (1989) called frame-breaking or re-creation. Frame-breaking affects strategy, use of power, organizational structure, and management controls. In a paper on radical organizational change, Newman and Nollen (1998) described a cycle of change in terms of convergence and divergence. Whereas incremental change is convergent, radical (or frame-breaking) change is divergent. It is a fundamental change in the firm’s processes, systems, structures, strategies, and core values. Romanelli and Tushman (1994) and Gersick (1991) asserted that new core values or new deep structures are necessary for radical change. Gersick (1991) used an example from the sport of basketball: An incremental change would be raising the height of the basket, whereas a strategic or radical change would be getting rid of the baskets altogether.
*What is frame-breaking change?* Due to the ability to study planned changes by both consultants and academics, much of the literature has been focused on reorientation, or frame-bending change. There are, however, many parallels that can be used to examine the ever-increasing occurrences of re-creation, or frame-breaking change. Hammer and Champy (2009: 50) defined this type of change as “the fundamental rethinking and radical redesign of business processes to achieve dramatic improvements in critical, contemporary measures of performance such as cost, quality, service, and speed.” They pointed out that the word “radical” is derived from the Latin word *radix* meaning “root.” Reengineering, as they referred to this type of change, is about business reinvention.

RTC has also been described as radical innovation. In his theory of the diffusion of innovations, Rogers (1995) suggested that radical innovations can create a high degree of uncertainty and discomfort, which can foster resistance. He referred to these disruptive and discontinuous changes as the type that create a new paradigm for doing work and, in extreme cases, can create new industry segments—for example, semiconductors, lasers, and e-commerce. The level of uncertainty and discomfort depends on the amount of new learning that organizational members must undertake to adopt the changes. Rogers pointed out that radical innovations at the highest level are much more difficult, as they require unstructured decision-making and processes.

Tushman et al. (1986: 585) described frame-breaking change as abrupt, painful to participants, and often resisted by the old guard. They used the word “upheaval” to describe these strategic changes. Additionally, they characterized frame-breaking change as follows:

- Revolutionary changes *of* the system, as opposed to incremental changes *in* the system
- Reshaping the entire nature of the organization
• Discontinuous, concurrent shifts in strategy, structure, people, and processes
• Dysfunctional, if the organization is currently successful in a stable environment

These frame-breaking changes have been difficult to study, as they happen without much, if any, planning and typically occur during some kind of crisis. Organizations are usually not very open to outside observation during these circumstances. It also takes some time for the change to settle in, which necessitates more longitudinal studies.

Radical Transformational Change in Practice

Organizations must change to survive. Tushman et al. (1986) discussed the pattern that companies follow when they go for long periods making only incremental changes followed by a sharp, painful, discontinuous, system-wide shift. Gersick (1991) referred to this as the “punctuated equilibrium paradigm” in a study of the leadership role during change phases. Researchers at McGill University studied more than 40 well-known (at the time) firms in diverse industries for at least 20 years per firm (Miller & Friesen, 1984). Based on that research, they found that the forces leading to frame-breaking change could come from one or a combination of the following:

1. Industry discontinuities—sharp changes in legal, political, or technological conditions that shift the basis of competition, deregulation, major economic changes, or patents.
2. Product life cycle shifts—innovation, cost, volume, efficiency, demand, and international competition that drive change.
3. Internal company dynamics—changes in organizational size, mergers, acquisitions, and inability to serve the market with the current structure or processes.
The nature of transformations that moved organizations away from the traditional silos of task separation, originally described in Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* (1776) and realized in the days of Henry Ford and Alfred P. Sloan Jr., are yesterday’s paradigm of industrialization (Hammer & Champy, 2009). Today’s organizations must deal with complexity as major changes introduce unpredictability. Complexity comes from changes in environment, market growth, customer demand, product life cycles, the rate of technological change, and the nature of competition, which can all defy easy prediction. The type of complex environment where these conditions exist not only demands change at a faster rate but also, increasingly, must cut much deeper into the heart of the organization. If this is not possible, then the organization’s survival is in question.

The paradox of planning organizational change in these cases is that the nature of something unpredictable can only be understood by letting it emerge. Much research has addressed establishing linear, phased ways of making change happen, yet the change process is not linear. When initiatives are launched, equilibrium is disturbed, and chaos ensues. This is due to the unpredictable environment in which many reactions take place simultaneously, and the system moves toward chaos (Burke, 2008; Pascale, 1999).

Hamel (2002: 5) highlighted how important it is for organizations to develop a capacity to handle “perpetual radical innovation” in light of the complex and turbulent environment. This can be extremely difficult as companies were built for incrementalism, as evidenced by their guiding metrics, management processes, and compensation systems. Hamel highlighted how many companies’ greatest accomplishment has been adopting the incremental, continuous improvement that started with scientific management from Frederick Winslow Taylor and carried on through the adoption of Japanese concepts of Kaizen, the 90s reengineering movement, and the adoption of enterprise resource planning (ERP) systems.
Even in 2002, Hamel described how a company must operate to survive in a nonlinear complex environment, where insight into opportunities for radical innovation is critical. Such situations have certainly played out over the past decade as data analytics and artificial intelligence have driven companies to innovate at a rapid pace. Organizations now must radically change their usual approach and go in directions that would not have been considered possible a decade ago. Kotter (2014) addressed this constant battle between the “normal” operations of the company and the need to radically innovate as he provided a blueprint for companies to have a “dual operating system” that could accomplish both in an independent yet tightly connected organizational structure. Anthony and Schwartz (2017) further confirmed this as key to organizational transformation when they captured the habits of successfully transformed companies. They found that the top transformers strategically pursued two journeys: simultaneously repositioning the core business and investing in new growth opportunities.

The relentless pace of change has put extreme pressure on everyone in an organization. Mostert (2014) illustrated this concept in his paper about the paradox that organizations face in dealing with tremendous pressure to do more of everything, which produces high-stress environments that drive away talented people because of the prevailing strategic thinking that they desperately need to survive. He pointed out that the stress on managers triggers a self-defense mechanism that inhibits their ability to process the frequency and amplitude of change. This was also captured by Stuart (1995) in his research of the triggers and effects on managers of leading significant organizational change.

**Shift, restructure, change, or die?** Amis et al. (2004) defined radical change as a shift from one archetypal configuration to another. An archetype is a collection of values and beliefs made manifest through particular structural arrangements. For example, Mintzberg
(1992) identified five archetypes for organizations: simple structure, machine bureaucracy, professional bureaucracy, divisionalized form, and adhocracy. He suggested that organizations can be differentiated along three dimensions:

1. The key part of the organization that has a major role in its success or failure
2. The prime coordinating mechanism for its activities
3. The type of decentralization used and how subordinates are involved in the decision-making process

The major components of his organizational model are the strategic apex (executives), operative core (workers), middle-line (middle management), technostructure (analysts, engineers), and support staff (indirect services).

Miller and Friesen (1984) referred to some changes as a process of restructuring. Restructuring is caused by changes to the environment in which an organization operates, technology changes, high growth, and changes in leadership (Miller & Friesen, 1984).

According to Bolman and Deal (2017), restructuring is like spring cleaning. Drawing on the work of Mintzberg (1992) and Miller and Friesen (1984), they suggested that each major component of Mintzberg’s (1992) model exerts its own pressures. Restructuring triggers a multidirectional tug-of-war that eventually determines the shape of the emerging configuration: “A structure’s effectiveness ultimately depends on its fit with the organization’s strategy, environment, and technology. Natural selection weeds out the field, determining survivors and victims” (Mintzberg, 1992: 86).

Miller and Friesen (1984) highlighted the episodic nature of restructuring. Organizations go through long periods of small changes followed by brief episodes of major restructuring. These disruptive innovations and radical changes cannot be engineered. They arise spontaneously and occur when people are motivated to think and act in different ways.
The periods of spontaneity are typically triggered by discovering a problem that cannot be solved with previous methods. There may also be a tremendous opportunity that cannot be satisfied by the status quo, which opens people’s minds to new ideas and calls older assumptions into question. Weick and Quinn (1999) described this type of episodic change as sporadic epochs of divergence, often referred to with words like “revolution,” “deep change,” and “transformation.” They wrote, “Change starts with failures to adapt and that change never starts because it never stops” (Weick & Quinn, 1999: 381). According to Gersick (1991), change can be conceptualized as a punctuated equilibrium—an alternation between long periods of stability that only permits incremental adaptations and brief periods of revolutionary upheaval.

While radical changes may happen in unpredictable ways, researchers have attempted to capture some emergent patterns to determine if the conditions are ripe for a large-scale RTC. Punctuated equilibrium theory (Newman & Nollen, 1998) suggests that radical change is often triggered by a change in the competitive environment, a change in leadership, or a significant decline in the organization’s performance.

The following excerpt from *Navigating the Badlands* (O’Hara-Devereaux, 2004) describes a historical perspective in which the conditions were set for a radical change:

There is no better historical example of this lesson than from the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance, when the Catholic Church was a monolithic force in control of knowledge and therefore of people’s lives. Merchants and traders on the fringe of society absorbed new ideas on their travels and invented places people could gather to discuss ideas outside of churches. Soon there was a growing desire for knowledge among ordinary people. The Catholic Church tried to squelch both the ideas and innovators, calling them heretics and damning them as opposing God and Church beliefs. As the Church’s power became increasingly undermined by trade and literacy, it became more corrupt in its quest to cling to power, a grip that was ultimately broken by the invention of printing technologies, making possible a surge of innovations from creating maps to books to the reorganization of knowledge into new
fields such as architecture and engineering. What followed eventually developed into the Age of Enlightenment, in the century that saw the formation of the United States of America.

Today most organizations and institutions developed to solve the problems created by innovations of the Industrial Era. In fact, the modern corporation developed to support mass production and manufacturing. Organizational innovations ranging from Frederick Taylor’s scientific management (which viewed both people and organizations as machines) to Henry Ford’s mass production assembly line fit the needs of the times. They enabled scalability, standardization, and mass merchandizing. As the Information Era (which arose in the 1950s) matures, it requires new forms of organization based on innovation and globalization and knowledge work. It should be no surprise to see Industrial Era structures breaking down around us. (O’Hara-Devereaux, 2004: 21–27)

In his model of evolutionary periods and revolutionary periods, Greiner (1998) identified the crises that drive a period of revolution, which also align with the growth pattern for the company. Four crises were noted: leadership, autonomy, control, and red tape. He also postulated on future crises that may arise as companies change—for instance, a crisis of people being exhausted by constant change, teamwork, innovation, and continuous improvement. As companies mature even further, other crises may emerge. One that has begun to show up is a crisis of not having new products or services to serve customers.

At various stages of an organization’s life, the organization encounters conditions that present a challenge. This “transformational imperative” happens when the traditional, accepted ways of doing business cease to deliver the results needed to hold on to a sustainable business model. Attempts to correct the problems are made using tried-and-true approaches that may have worked before but now do not seem to restore business viability (Francis et al., 2003). In the current complex, uncertain, turbulent business environment, organizations experience many challenges trying to get the right products, services, and capabilities to their consumers at the right time for the right price. In addition to creating higher demands, the outside environment is changing at a rapid pace. According to de Geus
(2011: 54), “If they don’t change what they offer and the ways in which they create and deliver that offering, there is a probability that their survival will be in doubt.”

Change can defy models. RTC also has a strong relationship with time, as its proponents argue that organizations go through long periods of evolutionary, incremental change interspersed with short, sharp, revolutionary transitions (Gersick, 1991; Greiner, 1998; Miller & Freisen, 1984; Nadler & Tushman, 1989; Weick & Quinn, 1999). Figure 3 depicts the stages of growth in three types of company growth contexts (high, medium, and low).

**Figure 3: How Companies Grow**

Source: Greiner, “Evolution and Revolution as Organizations Grow” (1998)

Greiner (1998) identified five key dimensions that emerge from looking at organizational growth patterns: an organization’s age and size, its stages of evolution and revolution, and the growth rate of its industry. While Figure 3 provides some graphic view of the premise of the temporary nature of RTC, it presents growth as linear and predictable. However, Greiner tried to warn managers consuming his work that growth is not linear. He
also pointed out the paradox for management: that the period of revolution they lead will become the problem that triggers the need for the next revolution.

Kanter (1994) also stated that the radical change process is not linear. RTC does not follow a pattern; it is messy and requires considerable trial and error. Chapman (2002) suggested that organizations undergoing RTC may have to fundamentally reevaluate their purpose and vision and expand the view of the groups and organizations that are critical to its success. As such, RTC often occurs with little or no planning, brought about by a sudden condition or realization that forces an organization and its members to shed the old way of doing things and create a new or highly modified method to ensure the organization’s survival. Radical change involves dramatic changes in strategy and abrupt departures from traditional work structures, job requirements, and cultures. People have to unlearn years, even decades, of procedures, rituals, beliefs, work habits, and relationships, all of which, in their view, have been working out fine (Nadler, 1998: 50). Nadler suggested a five-stage radical change model, attempting to create a linear model that described how organizational development professionals drove change in the 1990s. (The review of the literature and other models in this chapter indicates the bent toward a linear way of thinking about complex change.) In Nadler’s model, the stages were recognizing, developing shared direction, implementing change, consolidating change, and sustaining change (Nadler, 1998: 75).

Although the model clarifies the dynamics taking place during RTC, it is certainly not linear in practice.

Real change is intensely personal and enormously political (Nadler, 1998: 3). The reality of change in the organizational trenches defies rigid models and superficial management fads. Scott Adams, the creator of the comic strip Dilbert, created an ongoing chronicle of the excesses of heretical ideals (Kleiner, 2008). Nadler (1998: 6) described
change as a dynamic process that requires constant revision—staffing changes, reallocation of resources, strategic shifts, structural changes, refinement of mission, and articulation of values—within an overarching framework of focused objectives. The vision, influence, and power required to create and drive that kind of change can only come from the top of the organization.

A manager’s decision to move forward with change is a personal strategy (Nadler, 1998). Bass (1999) expressed that leaders who are focused on organizational renewal foster a culture that is open and conducive to creativity, problem-solving, risk-taking, and experimentation. Rolls (1995) asserted that corporations need leaders who have been through their own transformation so that they can help facilitate the transformation of others:

They need leaders who value people, growth, and learning, and who can help employees tap into inner reserves, re-invent themselves, become more attuned to interrelationship, connect to and value their own wisdom, work with colleagues in co-creation. (Rolls, 1995: 105)

**Resistance to radical transformational change.** Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson, and Singleton (2008) described the differences in change happening today versus change in previous eras. The nature of change is now more frequent, faster, more complex, and communicated much faster globally; it requires everyone in the organization to act and address problems immediately. Organizations must continually learn and reinvent themselves in the normal course of business (Pascale, 1999; Senge, 1997).

Tushman et al. (1986) highlighted the need for senior leaders to be involved in these frame-breaking changes due to the resistance that is triggered. Strong resistance may be due to a number of factors, including fear, anxiety, or commitment to the status quo. Political coalitions may quickly form due to the disequilibrium created by the change. Politics can be a major accelerator or inhibitor as the centers of power shift. Buchanan and Badham (1999) defined power as the capacity of individuals to exert their will over others, and politics as the
domain of power in action. There may be a feeling of loss of control during radical change as roles, responsibilities, systems, decision-making, and reward systems are in a state of change (Doyle, 2001, 2002; Tushman et al., 1986). How an organization communicates and does business with external constituents will change under these circumstances. The continuity of communication with suppliers, customers, regulatory agencies, and communities will be disrupted, though these constituents would prefer not to have their world disrupted either.

Relying on a transcript of a series of lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California, Berkley, in 1983, Zweibelson (2012) focused on the use of design theory in military decision-making in complex environments. He presented seven design theory considerations from his experience in applying design theory in military planning in Afghanistan:

1. To Appreciate the Game of Chess, Stop Thinking So Much About the Pieces
2. Know How to Wash Babies Before Throwing Out the Bathwater
3. In Complex Environments, Nosebleed Seats Often Trump the 50-Yard Line
4. When Your Organization Wants to Kill You, It is Not Always A Bad Thing
5. Flawed Concepts in Military Planning are Like Uninvited Relatives at Thanksgiving
6. Orchestra Sheet Music is Linear; Improvisational Jazz is Nonlinear
7. Emergent Drawings and Collaborations are Not Design Results (Zweibelson, 2012: 81–86)

Zweibelson contrasted military planning, where the values are focused on uniformity, repetition, and hierarchical structures, with the philosophy of design for complex problems, which focuses on adaptive systems, discredits repetition, and holds improvisation as far more useful for complex problem solving. He showed how these considerations are applied in
military, government, and business management environments where planning efforts must confront VUCA environments (Stiehm & Townsend, 2002). The approach required in these situations must avoid linear set procedures and sequences (Zweibelson, 2012).

Zweibelson’s (2012: 83) fourth design consideration, “When Your Organization Wants to Kill You, It is Not Always A Bad Thing,” refers to Foucault’s use of the term “problematizer” to describe someone who provides valid and useful advice that displeases a senior leader due to its critical nature. The leader may not want to hear the truth because it hurts. Foucault (1983) analyzed how this phenomenon is woven into Greek philosophy. In Foucault’s context, the emperor (leader) may kill the philosopher (problematizer) even when the problematizer provides sound advice if that advice threatens the institution’s core tenets or values. The entire institution itself may turn on the problematizer for critically addressing something in the organization and threatening to destroy or marginalize something deeply cherished. Zweibelson (2012) described how the institution might lash out and silence or destroy the problematizer as an act of self-preservation. Today, Zweibelson (2012: 84) argued, the military as an institution “kills” a military professional through marginalization, obstructionism, or employment termination. He pointed out that institutions would rather continue to do things a certain way and fail instead of transforming into a more successful but less familiar form.

**Transformational Leadership**

**Leadership and decision-making frameworks.** The decision to act in leading RTC is complex. One of the frameworks that addresses this is the logic of appropriateness (March, 1994). March argued that decisions are shaped by situational recognition, one’s identity, and the application of rules. Decisions are made by people asking themselves the question, What would a person like me (identity) do (rules) in a situation like this (recognition)? This is in
contrast to the dominant logic of consequences, in which decisions are “based on an evaluation of alternatives in terms of their consequences for preferences” (March, 1994: 57). The components of identity, rules, and recognition result in a cognitive pattern match. Identity refers to an individual’s personal history, personality, past experiences, values, status, and behaviors, to name a few. Rules allow people to narrow their options. These include not only explicit and codified guidelines for behavior but also social heuristics and habitual rituals (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4: Logic of Appropriateness**

![Logic of Appropriateness Diagram]


This is the basis of the model Kahneman (2011) presents in *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Heuristic processing has been characterized as a “fast, associative information-processing mode based on low-effort heuristics” (Chaiken & Trope, 1999: ix). Rule-based processing, by contrast, has been characterized as deliberate and demanding a higher level of effort. Weber, Kopelman, and Messick (2004) presented the application of March’s framework to decision-making in social dilemmas. They defined a social dilemma as situations having two characteristics: (a) individuals receive higher payoffs for making selfish choices regardless of the choices made by those with whom they interact, and (b) everyone receives lower payoffs if everyone makes selfish choices instead of making cooperative choices (Dawes, 1980; Kagel & Roth, 1995; Messick & Brewer, 1983).
The alternate decision-making framework presented is the expected utility/rational choice model (Ledyard, 1995; Luce & Raiffa, 1958; Pruitt & Kimmel, 1977). This is the prevailing theoretical framework that has been used in research on decision-making in social dilemma situations. In this model, the assumption is that the decision maker uses a type of cost-value decision, carefully evaluating choices and choosing to maximize payoff or benefit.

Figure 5 shows a collection of decision-making factors gathered from the literature on social dilemmas (Weber et al., 2004). This is an attempt to understand the possible rules-based decision-making variables that an individual considers in certain situations of this nature. The model is an attempt not to explain every decision made by people in this context but rather to provide a framework for thinking about the process mechanisms potentially in play. The authors also noted that much more research is needed, that there is great variation in identity variables, and that variables can be multifaceted, compounded, and messy, as March (1994) described in his research.

**Figure 5: Decision-Making in Social Dilemmas**

![Decision-Making in Social Dilemmas Diagram]

Weber et al. (2004) contended that this model downplays social influence processes. After describing the characteristics of both models, Weber et al. described how the logic of appropriate framework provides a better way to evaluate choice data due to the focus on the social aspect of a decision. This may help explain the motivations when change agents decide to go against established patterns and put themselves at risk to make a change.

The world is becoming more complex at an increasingly faster pace due to rapid change and advances in technology, competition, politics, economies, the global workforce, and regulatory requirements (Friedman, 2016; Hammer & Champy, 2009). In their article on presenting a framework of decision-making for leaders in different contexts, Snowden and Boone (2007) defined a framework called Cynefin, which allows executives to see things from new viewpoints, assimilate complex concepts, and address real-world problems and opportunities (see Figure 6). The framework provides five contexts defined by the nature of cause and effect: simple (later changed to obvious), complicated, complex, chaotic, and disorder. The first four provide leaders a framework to diagnose and apply appropriate actions. Disorder applies when it is unclear which context exists.

Through this framework, Snowden and Boone (2007) created a tool to allow leaders to assess the context and modify their approach to fit the complexity of the situations they face. As organizations face more complex problems, they must seek out different responses. In the context of software/systems development, agile/lean development practices represent responses to complex environments. “Obvious” contexts are ones in which there is a clear relationship between cause and effect. They require rules-based, best practice responses. In “complicated” contexts, there may be multiple known good practice responses that can be taken but may require expertise to select the correct response. “Complex” contexts do not have a known correct response. In these contexts, leaders must allow the path forward to
Figure 6: Cynefin Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMPLEX</th>
<th>COMPLICATED</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The relationship between cause and effect can only be perceived in hindsight.  
 probe – sense – respond                     | The relationship between cause and effect requires analysis or some other form of investigation and/or the application of expert knowledge.  
 sense – analysis – respond                   |
| Emergent Practice                            | Good Practice                                    |
| DISORDER                                     |                                                 |
| Novel Practice                               | Best Practice                                    |
| The relationship between cause and effect at system level.  
 act – sense – respond                        | The relationship between cause and effect is obvious to all.  
 sense – categorize – respond                 |
| CHAOTIC                                      | OBVIOUS                                          |


reveal itself. This typically happens through a series of experiments that support fast learning. The ability for leaders to tolerate failure and remain patient presents significant conflict in complex problem-solving environments. The lack of clear answers often pulls leaders back to what they know, rendering them helpless in dealing with complex situations.

“Chaotic” contexts do not have right answers. The relationship between cause and effect shifts constantly, and no pattern exists. A leader’s job in this context is to find some stability and move the situation into the “complex” domain.

Snowden and Boone (2007) provided five tools for leaders in complex domains. First, the leader must open up the lines of communication. Interactive large-group collaboration methods are most effective in generating innovative ideas. Second, the leader must set some
barriers. The barriers act as an aligning force to keep everyone on a path to a desired outcome. Third, the leader must stimulate attractors, which are small experiments to quickly learn if an approach might work. Fourth, the leader must encourage dissent and diversity. This needs to happen in a psychologically safe environment where everyone can challenge ideas without feeling a sense of ridicule. Finally, leaders must manage the starting conditions and monitor for emergence. Snowden and Boone (2007: 6) stated, “Because outcomes are unpredictable in a complex context, leaders need to focus on creating an environment from which good things can emerge, rather than trying to bring about predetermined results and possibly missing opportunities that arise unexpectedly.”

Bartunek and Moch (1987) described three categories of change in their studies and looked at the cognitive ways in which people deal with change in the context of their frame. All people have known patterns, referred to as “schemata,” they use to deal with the world around them. Bartunek and Moch referred to first-order change as change within the current schemata in which an organization operates. Second-order change is a change to the schemata, and third-order change involves a consultant training the organization to recognize the current schemata, thereby enabling people to change it as they see fit. However, this approach is from an OD consultant view and only covers planned changes. An RTC-level change would involve another level of an unpredictable event in which the complete schema would be replaced.

Every organization’s decision makers must assess contextual variables, both outer and inner. The outer decision makers include the environment outside the organization, and the inner decision makers include the organization’s culture, structure, power distribution, policies, and more. Conditions of crisis and distress are common grounds for transformational and charismatic leadership. Entrepreneurial environments—such as start-
ups, where there is great opportunity and optimism—can also breed this type of leadership (Conger, 1989), as can conditions of high uncertainty, such as a reorientation of the existing order or the creation of a new one. These are generalities, however, and some conditions of crisis, such as the loss of a major customer, might call for a more transactional approach. This highlights the need for leaders to understand the context of a situation and then draw on their own skills to adjust their approach if possible.

**Leading transformational change.** Leaders who can transform are a rare breed. Spinosa, Glennon, and Sota (2008) identified four virtues of transformational leaders:

1. They take a stand to accomplish the impossible. This involves figuring out the problem in their organization or industry, identifying the means to achieve the impossible, and then modeling behaviors that align with the new and better way.

2. They see the personal transformation in others. They connect the vision to the people doing the work. They pay close attention to the struggle that each person goes through in a change journey.

3. They set the corporate style or culture. The culture must be aligned with the new way of doing business and with norms and rules that encourage people to think differently than the status quo. They get people to see the urgency of change (Kotter, 2008).

4. They create the space for dialogue and debate and can listen for difference. They use empathetic listening, going deeper than words to look at the whole situation.

It should be said that transformational leadership is not best in all situations. The characteristics and needs of followers will vary by context, along with the resources and nature of opportunities available to a leader. There are stages of an organizational life cycle when transformational or charismatic leadership will be more appropriate or more
dysfunctional (Conger, 1999). Baliga and Hunt (1988) identified an organizational life cycle approach to leadership. They identified four stages of an organization, each with its own contexts: birth, growth, maturity, and revitalization or death. They pointed out that managers must be matched to the organization’s life cycle stage. A manager in one context may be ineffective in another, which raises interesting considerations for the selection, retention, and succession of managers. Their research indicated that transformational and charismatic leadership might thrive in the birth, growth, and revitalization stages, whereas a more transactional leadership model might be better in the maturity and death stages.

However, when the need for transformational change is recognized, it needs to be addressed quickly and cannot be done piecemeal, slowly, gradually, or comfortably (Gersick, 1994). It is critically important to drive the change with vision and quickly execute. This creates a synergy and sense of urgency that gets all parts of an organization moving together in a common direction (Amis et al., 2004; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985). The speed and momentum create an escape velocity that prevents pockets of resistance from forming. The lack of time also prevents over-analysis of the situation, sometimes referred to as “analysis paralysis.” Often, a group will form by decree or emerge by organic means. This group will be tasked with breaking old, established rules and putting everything into question. This can create great tension in the organization due to the mixed emotions for both the new pioneers and the people who must “stay behind.” It may be necessary to separate the radical and steady-state groups, at least temporarily (Francis et al., 2003; Kotter, 2014).

Fiedler and Chemers (1967) argued that work group effectiveness depends on an appropriate match between leadership style and the demands of the situation. The approach outlined by House and Mitchell (1974) is based on the assumption that a leader’s key function is to act in ways that complement the work setting or situation in which subordinates
operate. If this function is done well, subordinate satisfaction, motivation, and performance increase. According to Avolio and Bass (1988), from a transformation perspective, a successful leader must be able to read situations to determine when the time is right for changing individuals, organizations, or societal perspectives. It is here that contingency and situational leadership models can help a leader understand the importance of contextual factors on the success (or failure) of transformational leadership:

Transforming leaders must be able to diagnose what can be feasibly done given the formal and informal constraints of the environment within which they operate. Those who do not or who cannot may succeed through sheer perseverance, but the likelihood of success is probably lower. (Avolio & Bass, 1988: 38)

In the contingency model of leadership, leaders’ effectiveness depends on their style and the situation they encounter. The model—which assumes that a leader’s style is fixed and that, if it is a bad match, the leader must be replaced—depends on three factors:

1. *Leader-member relations*, which identifies how much trust and confidence exist.
2. *Task structure*, which refers to the type of work involved—structured or unstructured.
3. *The leader’s position power*, which is the amount of power the leader must use to direct the group and provide rewards and punishment.

Situational leadership (Hersey & Blanchard, 1969) is based on the principle that there is no best leadership style. Effective leaders adapt their style to the situation the people they lead are in based on the task at hand and the readiness of the organization. Hersey and Blanchard identified four styles that leaders can use based on the situation: directing, coaching, supporting, and delegating. An effective leader can adapt according to the situation.
RTC requires direct executive involvement in all aspects of the change. Executives must be involved with the specification of strategy, structure, people, organizational processes, and the development of implementation plans (Tushman et al., 1986). The executives must be exceptional people who combine the vision, courage, and power to transform an organization, or the motivation for a change of this magnitude may come from outside sources who put strong pressure on existing executives or bring in new ones to make the fundamental changes (Tushman et al., 1986).

Another approach to understanding the nature of transformational leadership comes from Bennis and Nanus (1985) and Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002) based on interviews and open-ended questions with middle- and senior-level managers. Bennis and Nanus (1985) identified four common strategies used by leaders in transforming organizations.

First, leaders must have a clear vision that describes a desired future state for the organization. A clear vision helps everyone stay focused and on a path to achieve what they set out to do. When everyone can see how their contributions connect to the overall direction, followers feel empowered. Although leaders typically articulate the vision, it is important that the vision emerge from both the leaders and followers.

Second, transforming leaders take the role of social architects for organizations. They create and shape shared meanings for followers. By creating and communicating a direction, leaders can transform values and norms, moving followers to accept new philosophies and group identity.

Third, transforming leaders create trust in their organizations by clearly stating their positions and acting out in ways that demonstrate their commitment to those positions. Leaders must remain stable and reliable, even in uncertain situations.
Fourth, transforming leaders use creative deployment of self through positive self-regard. Leaders are highly self-aware; they know their strengths and weaknesses. Again, remaining true to their capabilities creates a positive effect on followers by instilling a sense of confidence and high expectations. This extends to leaders’ approach to learning and relearning for themselves, which emphasizes education in the organization.

Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002) created a model based on their interviews of more than 1,300 managers in public- and private-sector organizations. The model consists of five practices that enable leaders to achieve extraordinary results with their followers and was based on a view that these practices can be used to develop the leader, as opposed to being some special quality innate to a leader, like charisma. Leadership is viewed as a relationship between those who aspire to lead and those who choose to follow. Leaders must learn to mobilize others to struggle for shared aspirations. The five practices outlined by Kouzes and Posner are as follows:

- **Model the way.** By finding their voice, being clear about values and philosophy, and setting an example, leaders establish credibility, a foundation of leadership. Leaders must clarify their personal values by building and affirming shared values that everyone can embrace. Followers test the leaders’ resolve and watch to see whether leaders do as they say and are consistent. Leaders set an example and build commitment through their daily routines, which create progress. They demonstrate this by working with people, telling stories, being highly visible (especially in times of uncertainty), handling critical incidents with a sense of calm and discipline, and asking questions that get people focused on values and priorities.
• **Inspire a shared vision.** Leaders inspire followers by envisioning the future, enlisting others in a common vision, and creating attractive opportunities through a compelling idea of a future state. They listen to the hopes of others and show them a path where those dreams can be realized. Leaders believe they can make a difference by changing the way things are and by creating or doing something that no one else has done before. Instead of commanding commitment, they inspire others to take up the vision. They must learn to speak the language of their constituents to gain the trust necessary to implement change. Leaders provide a view of the future that can uplift followers’ spirits and then challenge them to transcend the status quo and strive to be better, always.

• **Challenge the process.** Leaders challenge the process by searching for opportunities and by experimenting, taking risks, and learning from mistakes instead of trying to assess blame. Leaders are pioneers, willing to change the status quo and step into the unknown. This approach can be the leader seeking out opportunities to innovate, grow, and improve, or a significant external event that pushes an organization into a radically new situation. Leaders are continually learning. They recognize that failure is part of learning, and they encourage people to learn from their mistakes. When change brings stress, leaders create a climate in which people feel psychologically strong, providing the energy and trying to approach change through incremental steps and small wins that help build the confidence to meet big challenges.

• **Enable others to act.** Leaders enable others to act by fostering collaboration and empowering others. Leaders encourage teamwork and trust to build everyone’s capacity to deliver on promises and exceed expectations. Leaders make it possible
for everyone to do extraordinary work by creating a climate of trust. Leaders work to turn followers into leaders themselves, giving them the capability to act on their own initiative. People perform best when they feel a sense of empowerment and ownership, when commitment and support replace command and control. Excellent leaders do not hold on to power; they readily give it to others, enabling them to act. Followers who have more information, and are enabled, are much more likely to produce extraordinary results.

- *Encourage the heart.* Leaders encourage the heart by recognizing contributions and celebrating values and victories. Becoming a great organization is a long, grueling climb. People are taxed, exhausted, and frustrated. Leaders can uplift them by encouraging, appreciating, and truly listening to them; caring for people is at the heart of leadership. Celebrating and recognizing contributions create a fun environment where people learn to take the work seriously without taking themselves too seriously. When recognition and celebration are in line with the organization’s values, mission, behaviors, and key accomplishments, the leader can build a strong sense of community, a collective identity, and a sense of family that will help a group navigate tough challenges.

As Bennis (1983) concluded in his study of 90 directors and chief executive officers, successful transformational leaders create a compelling vision and have the self-determination to see it through no matter how difficult things become. They must be able to adapt and be willing to change with the context. If they lose their self-determination and become insensitive, they may not endure the demands on them and subsequently may be unable to achieve their mission.
Such models and approaches highlight the importance of change agents being both self-aware and situationally aware. In fast-changing environments, leaders must be able to adapt quickly. The factors affecting leaders’ ability to succeed will change rapidly, leaving them little time to plan what they will do when the organization reacts to their push for change.

**Heretics and parrhesiastes.** In the 1960s, when what was going on outside the walls of companies began to change the thinking inside, the age of the heretics began to emerge, as described by Kleiner (2008) in his history of radical thinkers that changed companies, *The Age of Heretics*. A heretic is someone who sees a truth that contradicts conventional wisdom of the organization but remains loyal to both (Kleiner, 2008).

In the early 1990s, it became respectable to be a heretic (Kleiner, 2008: 306), as transformation was enshrined as a management practice, a conscious movement away from stagnation after the movement in the 1980s toward TQM, lean, and other models. Veterans of General Electric in the 1980s and early 1990s were subjected to the Jack Welch (“Neutron Jack”) philosophy, which pushed people beyond their limits, worked them to the maximum, placed them on the road constantly, and made them constantly worry about being fired or burned out, especially after they reached age 40. The company ran on fear (Kleiner, 2008: 311; Welbourne, 1994). Many of the corporate heretics who emerged lost their jobs or failed to achieve their career objectives because they stayed true to what they saw and believed. As Kleiner (2008: 14) stated, “It is better to be a heretic than to have one’s soul wither through the denial of a truth. And in the end, the corporations of our time are much, much better because the heretics existed.”

Foucault (1983) used a term from Greek philosophy, *parrhesia* (free speech), which appeared for the first time in Greek literature with Euripides at the end of the fifth century
BCE and continued through the fourth century BCE. The parrhesiastes is the one who uses parrhesia, or speaks the truth. Foucault noted,

The one who uses *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes*, is someone who says everything he has in mind: he does not hide anything but opens his heart and mind completely to other people through his discourse. In *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks. The word “*parrhesia*” then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in *parrhesia*, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* uses the most direct words and forms of expression he can find. Whereas rhetoric provides the speaker with technical devices to help him prevail upon the minds of his audience (regardless of the rhetorician’s own opinion concerning what he says), in *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* acts on other people’s mind by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes. (Foucault, 1983)

Parrhesia contains elements of truth, danger, criticism, and duty. Foucault described the parrhesiastes as a person who says what is true because he or she knows that it is true. The parrhesiastes is sincere and speaks his or her opinion, but that opinion is also the truth. So, there is a coincidence between belief and truth. The parrhesiastes must have the moral qualities to first know the truth and then convey it to others. It requires courage to say something dangerous, something different from what the majority believes. A person who uses parrhesia is considered a parrhesiastes only if there is a risk or danger in telling the truth. If a philosopher addresses a sovereign tyrant and tells him that his rule is unjust, there is danger in being punished, exiled, or killed. Parrhesia demands the courage to speak the truth despite some danger.

Parrhesia is a form of criticism toward another or toward oneself, always in a situation where the speaker is in an inferior position with respect to the interlocutor. The truth may hurt or anger the recipient. The person who uses parrhesia usually feels it is his or her
duty to do so. In the face of the danger of telling the truth, the parrhesiastes is free to keep silent; he or she is not forced to speak the truth. Foucault summed up parrhesia as follows:

_a kind of verbal activity where the speaker has a specific relation to truth through frankness, a certain relationship to his own life through danger, a certain type of relation to himself or other people through criticism (self-criticism or criticism of other people), and a specific relation to moral law through freedom and duty._ (Foucault, 1983)

The problematization of parrhesia, however, is that there are no laws to govern who gets to speak the truth and the consequences of doing so.

Foucault also described the “parrhesiastic contract,” which was very important in the Greco-Roman world. Under the contract, a sovereign would tell the individual who had the truth, but not the power, that if he told the truth, no matter what it was, no harm would come to him. In practice, this limited the risk to the truth teller, as the contract was not an institutional foundation, just a moral obligation. This principle is also important in forming a safe environment in today’s world for people who tell the truth by attempting to drive radical change. Perhaps parrhesiastic contracts could limit the negative impact on RTC agents.

*Charismatic leadership.* The link between charisma and leadership was introduced by Max Weber (1947), who defined charisma as a special gift that certain individuals possess and that gives them exceptional powers, is of divine origin, and allows them to be treated like a leader. In the 19th century, Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle (1841) popularized the “great man” theory, making the case that history could be explained by the impact of great men (or heroes). These men used personal charisma, intelligence, wisdom, or political skill as a base to exert their power to shape history. The two main assumptions that Carlyle made were that great leaders are born with traits that enable them to rise and lead and that great leaders can arise when the need for them is great.
Downton (1973) argued that Weber’s notion of the charismatic leader was more applicable to the needs of the followers who created the leader. This supported Carlyle’s assumption that a leader arises when the need among followers is great. As presented in Figure 7 (Downton, 1973: 285), Carlyle, in contrast to Weber’s charismatic leadership theory, noted that the foundations of personal authority were rooted in legitimacy and trust. Legitimacy comes from social transactions, the ability of the leader to inspire followers, and the charismatic nature of the leader, which Downton attributed to the leader as the substitute for the follower’s ego ideal, aligning with Freud’s psychological factors of charisma (Freud & Strachey, 1962).

**Figure 7: Beyond the Hero Myth in Weber’s Political Strategy**

![Diagram of the Social and Psychological Foundations of Personal Authority](image-url)

Source: Downton, *Rebel Leadership: Commitment and Charisma in the Revolutionary Process* (1973)
House (1976) presented a theory of charismatic leadership that has many similarities and is closely associated with transformational leadership (see Table 2). He noted that these effects are more likely to occur when followers feel distress and look to the leader to bring them through difficulties. Charismatic leaders show followers the intrinsic value of work, which helps them see the benefits of what they do. Charismatic leaders help followers gain a better sense of self and then tie it to the organization.

**Table 2: Theory of Charismatic Leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personality characteristics</th>
<th>Behaviors</th>
<th>Effects on followers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dominant</td>
<td>Serves as strong role model</td>
<td>Trust in leader’s ideology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Desire to influence</td>
<td>Shows competence</td>
<td>Belief in similarity between leader and follower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-confident</td>
<td>Articulates goals</td>
<td>Unquestioning acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strong moral values</td>
<td>Communicates high expectations</td>
<td>Affection toward leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Expresses confidence</td>
<td>Obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Arouses motives</td>
<td>Identification with leader</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Emotional involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Heightened goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Increased confidence</td>
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**Rebel (revolutionary) leadership.** Burns (1978) distinguished three types of leadership: transactional, reform (which operates on parts of a system), and revolutionary (which operates on the whole system). He defined revolution as a complete and pervasive transformation of an entire social system—the birth of a new ideology. Drawn from the nature of political leadership, questions of intention and outcome become relevant, particularly concerning leaders such as Adolf Hitler and Saddam Hussein. While both were transforming leaders, their impact was overwhelmingly negative (Northouse, 2016).
Following the work by Bass (1998; Bass & Riggio, 2006) on pseudotransformational leadership, Northouse (2016) described pseudotransformational leaders as manipulative, dominating, and directing followers toward their own values rather than shared ones. Such behavior is threatening to followers because it is not in service of the common good.

The term “transformational leadership” was first coined by James V. Downton (1973) in his book Rebel Leadership. He defined leadership as a “coordinating structure of social systems, by means of goal setting, achievement, communication, and mobilization” (Downton, 1973: 14). He described revolutions as efforts to change the basic values that regulate behavior within social systems. He highlighted the importance of meaning and shared vision: “When a rebel leader attempts to create a revolution, they must give meaning to the collective action and suffering in order to encourage followers to invest and sacrifice” (Downton, 1973: 79). To that end, Downton defined “rebel leadership” as follows:

Those who initiate attacks against the political system, utilizing means that are contrary to generally accepted norms for sharply altering the distribution of resources or, intoxicated by the promises of revolution, for assuming political control in order to fundamentally alter patterns of human behavior. (Downton, 1973: 18)

Downton took a political perspective and reviewed rebel leaders through history who emerged in critical world events, including the end of world movement, the Bolshevik Revolution, the Black Muslim movement, and the Nazi revolution. He used these examples to illustrate extreme examples where rebel leadership, as he defined it, was most evident. He suggested that a rebel emerges when the context has values and requirements of adaptation that diverge from the norm such that “truly creative action by the leader is required” (Downton, 1973: 13). According to Downton, in these situations, a leader must mobilize and inspire innovations in followers to resynchronize the values and the environment. Later, Bass (1998) used the term “pseudotransformational leader” to distinguish a leader who is self-
consumed, exploitive, power-oriented, and has warped moral values (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This helped separate the destructive leadership of people like Hitler from that of leaders who pursued more morally grounded visions.

Burns (1978) characterized revolutionary leaders as passionate, dedicated, single-minded, ruthless, self-assured, courageous, tireless, usually humorless, and often cruel. Of course, this was in the era of the hero leader who is very directive in driving change. Using similar language, Meyerson and Scully (1995) described a “tempered radical” as an individual who identifies with and is committed to his or her organization, as well as a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture of the organization. This radicalism stimulates the leader to challenge the status quo. The temperedness reflects the way the leader has been toughened by challenges and angered by what he or she sees as injustices or ineffectiveness, and is inclined to seek moderation in interactions with members closer to the center of organizational values and orientation. The tempered radical is key in the battle for change because if he or she leaves, burns out, or become co-opted, then he or she can no longer contribute fully to the process of change from the inside (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). Meyerson and Scully’s research was based on issues involving extraorganizational, political sources of a person’s identity that may conflict with the values and beliefs associated with a professional or an organizational identity. However, this seems to correlate with what RTC agents might expect to deal with in their own organization: They must drive RTC, but they must also “live” in the organization.

*Transactional and transformational leadership.* In *Leadership*, James MacGregor Burns (1978) introduced a conceptual framework in which he distinguished between “transactional” and “transformational” in his study of political leadership. Transactional leadership involves the exchange of value, such as salary paid for work performance between
leaders and followers, and does not focus on individualized needs or development of followers. Transactional leaders wield power and influence when it is in the best interest of followers to do what the leaders want them to do (Kuhnert & Lewis, 1987). Transformational leadership, applied to the unique relationship between a leader and followers, occurs “when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels of motivation and morality” (Burns, 1978: 83). In *Transforming Leadership*, he described how transformational leadership involves expressing wants and needs in terms of values: “Leadership stands at the crossroads, broadening individual aspirations to embrace social change and building a society that responds to human wants, needs, and values” (Burns, 2003: 147).

Burns was heavily influenced by American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1908–1970), who is most famous for creating the hierarchy of needs (see Figure 8). Referred to as the father of humanistic psychology, Maslow established views of psychological health from a positive perspective rather than the disorder-based views of the time (Maslow, Stephens, Heil, & Bennis, 1998). Maslow’s hierarchy of needs created a rank ordering of human wants and needs. Maslow was interested in how changes in human motivation and behavior were driven by the satisfaction of these needs. He believed that human beings aspired to become self-actualizing by satisfying their needs, starting at the bottom and working their way up (Maslow, 1965, 1975).

Burns (2003) saw the link between Maslow’s theory and leadership theory and wanted to build a hierarchy of leadership based on this and the theory that leaders have an overwhelming desire for political and social security. Burns examined historical studies from Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, where millions of people were led to follow dictators out of the sheer need to establish order from marauding bands of killers and other
Figure 8: Hierarchy of Needs


anarchic behavior. This search for order forms the first level of Burns’s hierarchy that political leaders must satisfy. Burns was struck by the link between the drive for self-actualization in Maslow’s hierarchy and the motivation for leadership. He described this in his book *Leadership* (1978) as leading by being led. In *Transforming Leadership* (2003), he stated,

The leader’s self-actualizing qualities are turned outward. He empathetically comprehends the wants of followers and responds to them as legitimate needs, articulating them as values. He helps followers transform them into hopes and aspirations, and then into more purposeful expectations, and finally into demands. Leaders, I hypothesize, rise one step ahead of followers in this political hierarchy, but continued progress depends on their ability to stay closely attuned to the evolving wants, needs, and expectations of followers—in short, to learn from and be led by followers. And it requires a commitment to a process in which leaders and followers *together* pursue self-actualization. Their wants for belongingness, for esteem, are recognized and satisfied, efficacy is enhanced, and the potential for self-fulfillment—“to become everything that one is capable of becoming,” as Maslow put it—is activated.
What leaders and followers become, above all, are active agents for change, capable of self-determination, of transforming their “contingency into destiny.” (Burns, 2003: 143)

However, Burns was unable to pursue this link. Maslow’s theory was criticized for not being scientifically founded or validated, and Maslow did not do the follow-up work necessary to improve it (Burns, 2003).

**Transformational leadership models.** Bass (1985) expanded on the work of Burns (1978) and House (1976) to develop transformational leadership theory, which addresses the impact that transformational leadership has on followers. Bass focused on the needs of followers more heavily than on the needs of leaders. He contrasted “transformational” with “transforming,” as Burns (1978) called it, to illustrate the change in perspective. Burns saw leaders as being either transforming or transactional, whereas Bass considered leadership to be a continuum. On one end of the continuum is transformational leadership, and on the other end is laissez-faire leadership, with transactional leadership in the middle (see Table 3).

**Table 3: Leadership Continuum and Factors**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Transformational leadership</th>
<th>Transactional leadership</th>
<th>Laissez-faire leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Charisma</td>
<td>Rewards</td>
<td>Free reign</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspirational motivation</td>
<td>Constructive transactions</td>
<td>Delegative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual stimulation</td>
<td>Management by exception</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualized consideration</td>
<td>Corrective transactions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Bass’s (1985) leadership continuum suggests that transformational leadership holds followers to positive expectations and higher performance by (a) raising their level of consciousness about the importance and value of specified and idealized goals, (b) getting followers to transcend their own self-interest for the sake of the team or organization, and (c)
moving followers to address higher-level needs. As a result, transformational leaders inspire, empower, and stimulate followers to exceed normal levels of performance.

Wang, Oh, Courtright, and Colbert (2011) performed a meta-analysis of research on Bass’s model. Looking at 117 independent samples from 113 primary studies, they concluded that transformational leadership has a positive impact on performance outcomes across situations. Organizations can derive the most value in situations where teamwork, collaboration, and cooperation are needed.

However, Van Knippenberg and Sitkin (2013) took the opposing view, claiming there are four areas of contention:

1. Transformational leadership lacks a clear definition.
2. Theories do not specify a causal model linking performance to leadership.
3. There is a disconnect between the theory and operationalization.
4. Measurement tools (e.g., the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire; Bass, 1985) are invalid because they do not create a distinction from other aspects of leadership.

Van Knippenberg and Sitkin went as far as saying that researchers and practitioners are better off abandoning the construct of transformational leadership. So, even within the study of change, there must be change. The Four I’s of Transformational Leadership, proposed by Avolio, Waldman, and Yammarino (1991), describes four components of transformational leadership that correlate with the factors in Bass’s (1985) continuum.

The Four I’s provide a model for leadership to create organizations that produce performance well beyond what could be expected from transactional leadership. The Four I’s are as follows:
Figure 9: Transformational Leadership


- **Idealized influence**, also known as charisma, is focused on the role of influence in leadership. The transformational leader becomes the role model for followers who exhibit respect and admiration, causing them to emulate the behaviors they see. There is also mutual exchange of trust. Followers rely on the great potential and determination of leaders, who will bring them up to higher levels. The transformational leader must show the willingness to take risks and be consistent. In all situations, the transformational leader must show high standards of conduct and provide followers with a clear vision and sense of mission.

- **Inspirational motivation** posits that transformational leadership is driven by vision. A transformational leader engages followers by communicating expectations with them and showing optimism in reaching the goal. It is through this vision, and the activities and behaviors of the leader, that followers are motivated and inspired to achieve more than they would in their own self-interest. As the team works toward the goal, all members feel a sense of team spirit and
work enthusiastically as a group. The group members continue to demonstrate their commitments toward the goal, and good communication provides the motivation. Motivation is internal and self-generated, whereas inspiration can be thought of as external.

- *Intellectual stimulation* is a component of leadership that stimulates followers’ analytic skills and problem-solving ability. It helps followers become more creative and innovative, challenging their values and beliefs, as well as those of the leader and the organization. Transformational leaders need to allow followers to come up with their own solutions for a problem. If the issue is not understandable, a transformational leader can help followers reframe it. Stimulation by the leader encourages followers to approach old issues with new methods to create meaningful output.

- *Individualized consideration* states that understanding followers’ specific needs and supporting their continued professional and personal development can help them reach their full potential. Each follower is different, which means the leader must work diligently to understand and demonstrate how each follower might reach his or her full potential. The transformational leader works with each person to map out a path to help him or her move to higher levels of achievement and growth. The transformational leader can develop the follower by delegating increasingly more important tasks, and then monitoring and providing improvement ideas, increasing followers’ confidence and morale.

*Conditions for transformational leadership.* Transformational leadership has a great influence as companies find themselves needing complete makeovers to remain competitive in their industries. Eisenbach, Watson, and Pillai (1999) identified the importance of models
of outstanding leadership—including transformational, charismatic, and visionary, which all
focus on organizational transformation—because of the many changes occurring in the
business and political environment. Bass and Riggio (2006) wrote that the popularity of
transformational leadership might come from its emphasis on intrinsic motivation and
follower development. This approach fits better with the needs of workgroups, who want to
be inspired and empowered to succeed in times of uncertainty.

Pawar and Eastman (1997) proposed four factors that might affect organizations’
receptivity to charismatic and transformational leadership:

1. *Emphasis on efficiency versus adaptation.* If an organization is operating in an
efficiency orientation, it requires stability and administrative management
(transactional) to achieve its goals. But when the organization needs to adapt, the
leader must refocus everyone on a new vision and set of goals and values. The
leader must also work to overcome resistance to change by aligning the
organization to a new environment. The context and leadership approach must
also be aligned with the followers’ felt need for transformation; otherwise they
will respond better to transactional, administrative management.

2. *The relative dominance of the organization’s technical core versus its boundary-
spanning units.* This has to do with the organization’s orientation to internal or
external systems. External focus forces the organization to continuously adapt to
environmental conditions and, with those changing at higher rates, prevents the
organization from standardizing routines. These organizations are more open to
transformational and charismatic leadership and change.

organizational types to identify structures that are adaptive and open to change.
Mintzberg identified five organizational types: entrepreneurial, machine (bureaucracy), professional, divisional (diversified), and innovative (adhocracy). Entrepreneurial and innovative organizations are most conducive to transformational leadership.

4. *Modes of governance.* These are based on Wilkins and Ouchi’s (1983) three modes of governance (the market, the bureaucratic, the clan), where the interactions between the organization and its members vary. The clan mode, where the organization’s members are socialized such that people’s own interests and those of the organization are aligned, is the governance type that is most open to transformational leadership. It is clear from the research that the interaction of leaders, their capabilities, the contexts, and the constantly changing environments that this is a complex situation that cannot be easily codified.

Roberts and Bradley (1988) concluded from their research that context shapes leadership in at least two ways. First, an environment in crisis is more receptive to leadership and is more likely to be open to proposals for radical change common to transformational leaders. Second, organizations have characteristics that influence an individual’s latitude to take initiative and build personal relationships, which in turn shape perceptions of their leadership.

In general, periods of stress and turbulence are most conducive to transformational leadership (Conger, 1999). These times create a follower need for a leader who offers attractive solutions and visions of the future. It also affords the leader an opportunity to communicate and promote a transformational vision in uncertain times when the current organization and processes no longer seem to function effectively (Bryman, 1993).
Becoming an Agent of Change

Characteristics of a change agent. Garcia (1996) described radical change agents as people with a passion for making things better in their workplace, intellectual agility in adapting myriad theories and practices, and great intestinal fortitude as they go from one mission to the next, trying to assess risks, benefits, and strategic approaches. She identified how the change agent must have a passion for the mission and a “big dose of a sense of humor” (Garcia 1996: 579) to be most effective. Change agents are “outsiders within,” or people who have the knowledge and understanding of an insider with the critical view of an outsider. They recognize when there is an issue or problem to work on, and they can act as critics of the current state or of proposed changes that appear too radical. Because they challenge both the status quo and overly radical changes, they can do a good job advocating for both. By positioning between the status quo and overly radical changes, they can gain support from both sides (Meyerson & Scully, 1995).

Beyond these general characteristics, the role of change agent is not well defined or understood in many organizations. Their contributions are poorly recognized, poorly supported and encouraged, and inadequately rewarded in financial or career terms. There is also a lack of systematic management development in change expertise, which may be attributable to the lack of clear distinction between the skills required in the day-to-day line management role and those required to manage change (Buchanan et al., 1999).

Facing organizational resistance. When a change is made at the depth and breadth of RTC, there are risks. McKinsey & Company conducts regular surveys on organizational transformations. Over the past decade, executives from around the globe have reported transformation efforts failing about 70% of the time (Jacquemont et al., 2015). This 70%
statistic has become somewhat of an urban legend, as it keeps surfacing in many organizational change writings without much evidence or research (Hughes, 2011). To highlight a few of the most referenced studies, Hammer and Champy (2009), Kotter (1995, 2008), and Beer and Nohria (2000) all referred to the 70% failure rate.

While many variables and types of change can derail a transformation, under the right conditions, organizations can mitigate many of the risks to increase their chances of success (Isern & Pung, 2007; Jacquemont et al., 2015; Keller, Meany, & Pung, 2010; Kotter, 1995). Due to its nature, RTC carries a higher degree of risk. Organizational leaders often ignore the signals that change is needed and avoid putting themselves in the position of making a critical decision. There is no cause-and-effect solution to the types of problems and conditions that leaders see in these complex situations. A standard formulaic response from past experiences is not available.

Burke (2008) highlighted the paradox of planning organizational change in a linear way of thinking while recognizing that the change process is not linear. This change disturbs equilibrium and moves the organization into what seems like chaos (Pascale, 1999). The source of this hesitation or refusal may be a case of perceptual blindness, avoidance of pain, reaction to fear, purposeful avoidance to serve oneself, or simple ignorance of the problem. But when the trigger is pulled, change must be implemented rapidly.

Schabracq and Cooper (1998) indicated that people follow a set of “situated roles” or patterns on a day-to-day basis as a mechanism to reduce uncertainty. Introducing change, especially dramatic change, raises doubts about whether an employee’s skills are still valid. According to Heifetz and Linsky (2017), habits, values, and beliefs, even dysfunctional ones, are part of one’s identity. When change agents attempt to change the way people see and do things, they challenge how those people define themselves. Burns (1978: 416) illustrated this
by saying that “a system can appear dynamic in guarding its own statics. A leader who departs from system or group norms in some decision will suffer undue attention, pressure, sanctions, and perhaps rejection or exclusion.”

RTC creates an entirely new context in which an organization and its people must operate. Organizations are challenged when they become aware that their core values, routines, and strategies are built on an outdated business model that has become competitively inferior, reactionary, or obsolete (Francis et al., 2003). The awareness that the organization’s business model (their cognitive map) no longer fits creates a complex situation. It requires both emotional and situational coping that leads to a variety of productive—and nonproductive—actions. Some organizations may deny the reality and hold onto their current thinking, assuming the situation will return to “normal,” and dig deeper into the current strategy. Another response is to make an incremental adjustment in some parts of the current strategy in hopes of solving the problem. In challenging times, this might involve cutting out areas deemed unnecessary, such as employee development and training, process improvement, and market development.

In RTCs, the organization must consider a complete change in strategy, structure, culture, values, and redesigned processes (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996). Organizations that select this approach believe that old behaviors are less effective in a changed context (O’Hara-Devereaux, 2004). O’Hara-Devereaux (2004: 10–15) posited that “putting an end to what no longer works is the first phase of any transition, and it is sure to be painful. . . . Pain is not only a barometer of truth but also a formidable gateway to growth, new understanding, and powerful, positive evolutionary change.”

Resistance during frame-breaking change challenges the heart of a change agent. Leaders risk putting their credibility and position on the line to get people to tackle the tough
problems at hand, and those who do face resistance, discipline, and rebukes from senior management for “breaking the rules.” Most are prompted to get “back in line” or find the door (Nadler, 1998: 81). The forces of resistance—including individual opposition, political coalitions, lack of control within a system out of equilibrium, and external constituents—are focused on “killing” the change or the change agent (Blanchard, 2009).

Change agents are driven by a purpose, but in serving that purpose, they make others uncomfortable. They do this because in order to introduce a change and see it through, they must be “unceasingly innovative, constantly questioning the status quo, challenging fundamental assumptions about the business, and helping to create or reinforce the vision of the company. Their passion is not always welcomed, understood, or long-suffered” (Jerome & Powell, 2016: 5). These leaders are labeled as disruptive, uncooperative, intolerant, and insensitive.

Jerome and Powell (2016) cited statistics from their research interviews of people hired as change agents:

- 64% said politics got in the way of doing what they were hired to do.
- 51% said they encountered a stifling political environment.
- 48% said that management said one thing and did another, with inconsistent direction and commitment.
- 34% said they faced an environment that resisted new ideas.

These environmental factors resulted in the change agent leaving, whether by personal choice, the organization’s choice, failure of the change initiative, or some combination of these.

Organizations create pressure and stress for individuals by burdening them with the responsibility of driving change for which they have inadequate time and skills. Continuous
change, rather than discrete initiatives, has been the norm since the 1990s. Fear of the unknown continues to be the major source of resistance to change. Buchanan et al. (1999) found that managing change is exhilarating and challenging but also pressure-filled and stressful, requiring significant negotiation, persuasion, and influencing skills. Organizations provide little skill development and support for managers in a change agent role, as this is seen as an add-on to the normal role of the manager or leader. Individuals in these highly stressful situations may experience severe demotivation, or in some cases, it may precipitate their departure from the organization. This is often the result of putting these people in a risky and vulnerable role without the right level of training and support.

Vince and Broussine (1996) noted some defense mechanisms individuals use to assist in the management of situations that threaten the ego, including repression, regression, projection, reaction formation, and denial. Understanding and dealing with these reactions is critical in times of intense change. Kanter (1999) cautioned change agents that the critics will emerge in the middle of the change when the impacts become clear, and those who feel threatened can formulate their objections and form coalitions of their own to combat the change.

Heifetz and Linsky (2017) described the faces of danger for change agents: marginalization, diversion, attack, and seduction. Change leaders are marginalized when they are demoted or removed from their assigned area. Diversion is used to get the change agent to focus on another problem area instead of continuing to drive the original targeted change. The attack comes in the form of direct conflicts with those involved in the change, and the seduction is getting the change agent to cease driving change by praising him or her for how much improvement has been made, even though there is still much to do.
Shepard (2006) offered up several rules of thumb for change agents. The first rule is to stay alive. He counseled against self-sacrifice for a cause that change agents do not wish to be their last. But if they believe in the cause, Shepard advised, they should put their whole being into the undertaking:

Staying alive means staying in touch with your purpose. It means using your skills, your emotions, your labels and positions, rather than being used by them. It means not being trapped in other people’s games. It means turning yourself on and off, rather than being dependent on the situation. It means choosing with a view to the consequences as well as the impulse. It means going with the flow even while swimming against it. It means living in several worlds without being swallowed up in any. It means seeing dilemmas as opportunities for creativity. It means greeting absurdity with laughter while trying to unscramble it. It means capturing the moment in the light of the future. It means seeing the environment through the eyes of your purpose. (Shepard, 2006: 365)

Argyris (1992) described organizational defensive routines that block changes that would help organizations survive. He pointed out four causes of defensive reasoning that contribute to the paradox: human programs (patterns) that shelter people from dealing with embarrassment or threat, managers who use these patterns skillfully to manipulate the behavior of people in the organization, organizational defense routines that result from blocking change initiatives, and the organizational “fancy footwork” used to protect these defensive routines.

Organizational defensive routines create a double bind. Not confronting them reduces performance and commitment and raises concern for the organization. Confronting them also creates issues and results in skilled incompetence. Argyris (1992) recommended approaches for change agents to overcome these defenses but did not discuss who these change agents are and where they come from. In most of the early literature, change agents were assumed to be managers, as managers were responsible for driving change. Shepard (2006) noted that change agents are confronted with the destructive aspects of the situation they are trying to
resolve. Change agents must be aware of these forces. Constructive forces are masked and suppressed in a problem-oriented, envious culture and allow people to leverage the capacity for joy instead of resentment. He advised change agents focus on getting people out of destructive conflict by helping them discover their commonalities and find the common purpose that brings them together.

When leading a radical change, change agents are challenged by perceptions of hypocrisy, isolation, co-optation, and other emotional burdens that arise from challenging the status quo but resisting change that is too radical (Meyerson & Scully, 1995). These agents, who are seen as too radical by some and too conservative by others, may experience loneliness because it is impossible to pick sides. Thus, they wind up in the middle, unable to affiliate with one community or the other. Co-optation manifests through the pressure to identify more closely with the “insider” role and to make compromises that appear to betray their principles. Another challenge is the resentment and backlash that come from speaking out after years of quietly tolerating the status quo. These challenges can be quite painful, and radical change agents report difficult feelings when dealing with them (McIntosh, 1989).

Huy et al. (2014) studied the legitimacy judgments and emotional reactions that impact radical change implementation. They defined legitimacy as “the judgment that an entity is appropriate for its context” (Huy et al., 2014: 1,654). Change agent legitimacy is often problematic and under constant scrutiny because change agents ask people (most often subordinates) to make disruptive changes that impact identity, routines, and norms, and to make sacrifices on behalf of the organization. This is a source of resistance to change from the people affected by it. As people assess the perceived impact of the change to their goals and values, they either deem the change beneficial and have pleasant feelings or they deem it harmful and may adopt a passive/avoidance approach.
Huy et al. (2014) cited the case of a large IT company that went through a number of radical changes to ensure its long-term survival. The researchers focused on top management, with change agents and middle management as the change recipients during the implementation of planned radical organizational change. In this case, change was coming from the top (a newly hired CEO) and involved changing the top management team, splitting the company into multiple business units, changing the company’s incentive system, reducing cost, reducing the workforce by 25%, and recruiting new managers to develop sales and marketing skills. As legitimacy for the change drivers began to shift due to negative assessment, it created a very active, overt resistance that delegitimized the top management team (radical change agents) and sped up their exit from the firm.

Gino and Staats (2015) identified a number of challenges organizations face in sustaining a focus on learning. First, there is a bias toward success that translates to a fear of failure, a fixed mind-set, an overreliance on past performance, and an attribution bias such that errors and mistakes are not looked upon as opportunities to learn. Second, a bias toward action leads to exhaustion and a lack of reflection, so time is not taken to think about what’s going well and what’s not. Third, a bias for fitting in leads people to stay “in the lines” and conform to the norms and rules like everyone else. This prevents people from using their strengths at work, causing a lack of engagement. Finally, there is a bias toward expertise, which can inhibit learning, as new views conflict with the tried and true expertise of “this is how it’s done” approaches. It also limits the amount of frontline involvement, which is where some of the best ideas lie.

Buchanan et al. (1999) pointed out that the prescriptive elements of change leadership literature are repetitive in their advice: clear goals, systematic planning, broad consultation, and effective communications. However, many managers have trouble translating these
“textbook recipes” into practice because they ignore or are unable to sense the rapidly changing environment in which they operate. They employ the cognitive patterns that have brought them success in the past and hope that they keep working. Little is known about how organizations manage the formulation and implementation of processes for selecting, developing, rewarding, and supporting change agents in their role or about the lived experience of change agents and the emotional, ethical, and social issues they encounter (Woodhall, 1996).

Cramm (2009) commented that while change management workshops are helpful in learning how to analyze stakeholders, build communication plans, and develop skill and conditions for leading change, “no one ever tells you that to be a good change agent, you have to be willing to die in order to thrive.” This is not meant in the literal sense, of course; rather, change leaders must be willing to put their job or position at risk. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) supported the view that the initial risk of exercising leadership is to go beyond one’s authority, putting credibility and position on the line. They provided a view of what a leader might experience: “You will face resistance and possibly the pain of disciplinary action or other rebukes from senior authority for breaking the rules. You will be characterized as being out of place, out of turn, or too big for your britches” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017: 24).

Agocs (1997) presented some of the characteristics of institutionalized resistance to organizational change. One of the areas she focused on is the attacks on the messengers and their credibility during change. Denial of voice (or “shooting the messenger”) is a well-known form of denial. Attacking groups or individuals who support or advocate the need for change is common. The target group of a change may feel like the suggestion to change is a personal attack rather than an indication that the system in which they operate is problematic. Denial may also be expressed in personal attacks on the change agents with the objective to
marginalize them. Change agents may be deemed unbalanced, too ideological, irrational, or myopically focused on a single issue, among other personal attacks. The objective of this type of denial is to force change agents to defend themselves from attack instead of driving the needed change. The burden of these attacks on the change agent requires them to have knowledge, skill, courage, commitment to the change, and a strong survival instinct.

Gharajedaghi (2011) described an organization with a biological view—a single-minded living system, just like a human being, with a purpose of its own. He referred to the culture of the organization as a shared image. The culture is at the center of the change process, and the success of the change agent depends on the degree to which the agent penetrates and modifies the “shared image.” The downside is that once this image is formed, it acts as a filter that rejects all contrary messages. This explains why it is so difficult to introduce change into sociocultural systems. Unless the stored shared image is altered, these systems go on to replicate themselves indefinitely.

In addition, Gharajedaghi (2011) described how a change agent might be subjected to enormous intimidation by traditional forces. Questioning the practices of the organization is treated as an insult and is “punishable by death in such systems” (Gharajedaghi, 2011: 10) in the figurative and sometimes literal sense. He further explained how the ability to question these assumptions without fear of repercussions is a necessary social good that must be preserved. This highlights the need for an inclusive shared image of a desired future, commonly referred to as “the vision.” Without it, chaos erupts, and the result is the failure of an organization to transform.

**Personal and professional impacts.** Radical change agents pay a price. In medieval times, it was the penalty of death; history is rich with examples of leaders who paid the ultimate price, sacrificing their lives to drive radical change. Heifetz and Linsky (2017: 11),
recounting the early 1990s assassination of Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, wrote, “Assassinations are extreme examples of what people will do to silence the voices of frustrating realities.”

Today, the penalty is demotion, resignation, fear, or being ignored and undermined (Nadler, 1998). When change agents question people’s values, beliefs, or lifetime habits, they appear dangerous to those they are asking to change. Change agents see a better future, whereas others see a loss of something they hold dear. People do not necessarily resist change; they resist loss, so leadership becomes dangerous when it must confront people with loss (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Doctors face this challenge on a regular basis. They often have to tell patients what the patients need to hear rather than what they want to hear. They do this to help patients eat a healthy diet, maintain a pattern of exercise, or ensure that they take necessary medications. People avoid painful adjustments in their lives if they can avoid them, blame someone or something else, or get someone to rescue them. Dysfunction usually ensues when people seek easy answers to complex, nonlinear problems.

If the radical change does not deliver desired results quickly, intense and explicit resistance to change sets in. This may trigger the removal of senior leaders, or they may leave of their own accord. Active and overt resistance comes from highly charged negative emotional reactions that accelerate a delegitimization of the radical change agents and subsequently their exit from the organization (Huy et al., 2014).

Tushman et al. (1986) cited data from a Columbia University study showing the relationship between frame-breaking change and CEO succession. In the study, more than 80% of frame-breaking changes were coupled with CEO succession, meaning these change agents were recruited from the outside. In the remaining cases, the existing CEOs made
major changes in their direct reports. However, the authors did not compile longitudinal data that showed what happened to these people later in their career.

Buchanan et al. (1999) identified that researchers need to look at change management theory from the change agent’s perspective and focus on the emotional and ethical burdens that many change agents take upon themselves. Jerome and Powell (2016) highlighted the problems that organizations and their critical change agents face. In The Disposable Visionary: A Survival Guide for Change Agents, they stated the core problem:

Organizations say they want progress, but they don’t really want to change. They try reorganizations, draft new mission statements, or issue declarations that “the customer comes first.” But they don’t address what really drives an organization: where the power really lies, how risk is accepted, if self-promotion is recognized or encouraged over selfless contributions, and how unwritten traditions become obstacles to change and improvement. (Jerome & Powell, 2016: 3)

Heretics face a particularly difficult battle. They question the company’s purpose because they cannot make long-lasting change in a corporation without an alternative image of what its purpose should be. Perhaps an organization exists for its heretics. Perhaps its long-term purpose is to help people expand their souls and capabilities by providing venues within which people can try things on a large scale, to succeed or fail and thereby challenge the world (Kleiner, 2008: 318).

Grant (2017) supported this idea in Originals: How Non-conformists Move the World, capturing the stories of well-known innovators and radical change agents. The book included a discussion of economist Albert Hirschman’s model of what people do in dissatisfying situations. The choices are exit, voice, persist, or neglect (Hirschman, 1970). “Exit” involves removing oneself from a situation. “Voice” means speaking up and making the effort to improve something. “Persist” refers to dealing with the situation as it is, even if it is wrong. “Neglect” means staying in the situation and beginning to decline in effort or performance.
These choices have varying effects on organizations, leading to detriment or benefit, driving change or maintaining the status quo.

This uncertainty, the likelihood of being unable to cope, and the difficulty of learning new skills all increase the level of stress in an organization, both individually and collectively (Callan, 1993; McHugh, 1997). This can lead to physical health issues, as indicated in many studies, including Beehr and Newman (1978); Hansson, Vingård, Arnetz, and Anderzén (2008); and Wahlstedt and Edling (1997). It is not unusual for people to suffer from mild depression and emotional fatigue in the aftermath of sustained turmoil, and management has to find ways to revive and sustain a sense of challenge (Nadler, 1998: 81).

McKendall (1993: 101) argued the validity of the OD efforts in the 1990s: “Planned organizational change efforts produce fear, confusion, frustration, and vulnerability because they cause uncertainty, break up the informal organization, reaffirm the position of management, and entrench the purposes and goals of management.” At the time, change was “inflicted” upon employees by management, and management used change as a means of control. However, McKendall highlighted the personal impacts change could have. She was highly critical of management and OD and expressed the frustration that “too many managers and change agents approach change with a missionary zeal, entirely convinced of their wisdom in implementing the change and blithely espousing the virtues and benefits of the intervention” (McKendall, 1993: 102). This clearly indicated that the ways in which change was handled would need to evolve if the frequency and impact of change increased, which of course they did.

Amis et al. (2004) and Doyle (2001) indicated that dispersing change agency to more people in the organization as a coping mechanism to handle the increased frequency of change places a heavy burden on individuals, causing what Buchanan et al. (1999) and Doyle
The term describes a concept with various dimensions related to radical and rapid change—notably, a sense of personal overload, not being able to cope with continuing new demands, not being able to consolidate and learn from experiences, and dealing with concerns about work-induced stress. Continued fatigue could lead to disillusionment and cynicism in the face of further changes. If not prepared, change agents can suffer significant stress and trauma, which affect their emotional well-being and job performance (Doyle, 2002). It is difficult to maintain continuous pressure to learn year after year; students get a break from school periodically, but members of organizations do not. They must continually be in the state of a “learning organization” (Gino & Staats, 2015; Senge, 1997).

**Literature Review Conclusions**

Since the late 1950s, companies have followed the same basic organizational change models, with only minor adaptations. Those frameworks, while helpful for planning and implementing incremental change, do not translate well to organizations attempting rapid RTC. RTC defies traditional growth models, which are linear and predictable, and requires constant reassessment of an organization’s vision and needs. The speed of change necessary to survive in today’s business environment introduces chaos, complexity, and communication challenges that previous models simply do not account for. This frenetic pace makes RTC difficult to study, and what research does exist focuses more on strategy and execution than on outcomes.

Nevertheless, research has shown that transformational, rather than transactional, leaders are well suited to make such changes, as RTC is a high-intensity change that reinvents rather than reorients. Organizations drive transformational change because business needs or a crisis necessitates it, and these organizations are best served by installing decisive
leaders with the imperative and authority to act swiftly. These individuals must be directly involved in the day-to-day workings of RTC and must be capable of inspiring, challenging, and enabling their followers while traversing complex social and political landscapes. Some decision-making frameworks help leaders establish context to make these choices, and others address how to navigate social dilemmas. But none specifically address how to lead rapid, complex change on an organizational scale.

Because the process itself is relatively new and not well studied, there is poor understanding of what change agents who drive RTC do for organizations. Likewise, researchers have not produced good data related to why leaders decide to take on RTC and whether they are aware of the risks involved. With organizational upheaval come employee dysfunction, anxiety, and resistance, which create more volatility than planned, steady change. Change leaders are often labeled as heretics, malcontents, and disrupters while executing change, but the literature does not provide sufficient insight into the outcomes of and impacts on change agents, such as the long-term effects on their job prospects, potential emotional distress, and disruption to their family lives. If RTC is the new norm, then managers, employees, and most importantly the change agents driving the effort need to know how to best position themselves for success, adapt to the rapidly shifting demands of transformational change, manage organizational uncertainty and employee resistance, and understand what impacts they should reasonably expect, both professionally and personally, at the end of the process.

These needs inform the research and survey questions developed in Chapter 3, which gather the real-world experiences of individuals who have led RTC to help shed light on the character traits change agents have in common, why they decide to implement change, and
what they experience in the aftermath. Chapter 3 discusses the methodology, participant selection processes, and analysis techniques used.
CHAPTER 3: PARTICIPANTS AND METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter begins with a review of the study’s purpose and the research questions. To respond to these questions, I describe the methodology used, including the design of the research, the survey instrument, process for the selection of participants, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. This chapter also includes a summary of the study’s purpose and a description of the research questions.

This study was focused on identifying the factors that drive people to make the decision to lead RTC, how they experience the change process, and the effects of doing so. This project was a qualitative study utilizing an interview and questionnaire approach to explore the lived experiences of people who have led a major change in an organization. The focus of the questions was on understanding each respondent’s inner voice as he or she made the decision to lead a change and what he or she experienced as a result. Although I did not collect demographic information, I asked the participants to identify their role in the organization at the time of the change, what transpired in their career as a result of leading the change, and where they are today. I did this to maintain anonymity and focus on the research regarding the consequences of a change agent leading RTC. This anonymity allowed participants more freedom to speak freely.

As I highlighted in the literature review in Chapter 2, there are many models for change and change leadership, but there is little research on people who put themselves in the position to do this and why. The firsthand experiential data collected in this study could help further the development of change agents as companies face increasingly complex, fast-changing environments where they must develop the capability to change quickly to meet the
needs of customers and stakeholders. These companies do not have the luxury to wait for change agents to rise up; they must develop this as a corporate capability.

**Author Experience**

My past experiences in driving RTC should be mentioned. My primary experience began in 2002, when I led a change of this type in my role as vice president of product development at Primavera Systems in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania. I was recruited into the organization with the intention of fixing a broken system in software product development. The company’s senior leadership and ownership believed their problem was personnel performance, but in reality it was more of a process issue. The existing processes were deep-rooted, tried-and-true methods in the software development industry, but these known approaches were increasingly becoming outdated in their ability to produce required outcomes in the context of the time. This gradually revealed the need for radical change, not just in this organization but also in the software development industry en masse.

Having recognized that this change needed to happen, I began to explore the personal leadership challenge this would pose. This required some deep soul-searching and decision-making, knowing that fighting for the health of the organization may endanger my future in the organization or cause reputational damage. Then came a long process of personal decisions and dealing with family who preferred a less risky path, with resistance from the organization, and later with the consequences of my actions. The personal experiences of facing strong opposition, enduring ridicule from those around me, dealing with intense stress both at work and at home, enjoying great success, and then leaving the organization due to frustration of not being rewarded for my efforts by the owners of the company made me think about the paradox of this situation.
This study was inspired by that experience, as well as the lack of writing on the topic specifically from the change agent’s perspective. My experiences help illuminate themes in responses from others who may have had similar experiences, thoughts, and feelings. Many of the participants are people I dealt with as a teacher, coach, or advisor helping organizations transform themselves as they faced similar challenges. As to the question of bias, there is no doubt that my experiences could have shaped the interpretations I made during the study, but there was significant benefit to letting participants’ lived experiences reveal deeper meanings via the interview and survey questions.

Galdas (2017) pointed out that in qualitative research, especially phenomenological studies, the researcher is part of the process and final product. Researchers must examine the transparency and reflexivity of their preconceptions, relationship dynamics, and analytical focus. According to Groenewald (2004), the phenomenological research design focuses on the lived experiences of people who have experienced a particular phenomenon. The researcher’s direct knowledge and experience of the phenomenon facilitate the discovery of facts and meanings through conversation and empathy with participants (Englander, 2012). Englander (2012: 25) stated,

As a phenomenological researcher I am present to the research participant as someone who reports having lived the phenomenon under investigation. The phenomenon is the object of investigation, not the person, although obviously, a person is required to describe the phenomenon.

I was completely aware and transparent about my bias in the selection and interviews of the participants. My experience was key in helping them quickly open up about their own experiences, feelings, and thoughts as they went through their journey. I was careful in how I constructed the questions to ensure I did not lead them toward a way of thinking that matched my own.
Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

• What factors trigger a “go” moment in leaders initiating a radical change in an organization?
• What risks do change agents perceive to themselves in leading radical organizational change?
• What are the resulting personal and professional impacts on the change agent?

The survey given to participants contained 10 open-ended questions, listed below as well as in Appendix A:

1. Describe a time when you led a major radical transformational change in an organization?
2. What was your role in the organization?
3. Were there any personal/professional risks you were aware of going into the change process?
4. Were there any personal feelings of a “go” moment you were aware of as you decided to drive this change?
5. What were your personal thoughts and feelings as you started the process?
6. How do you feel you were treated in the change process (by management, peers, employees, family, friends)?
7. Did you consider any implications based on the success or failure of the change?
8. What was your eventual fate with that organization?
9. What came next for you? What role do you currently have in your present company?
10. Are there factors in your life or career that you feel contributed to your recognition of the need for change, and your ability to drive it?

These questions were designed to obtain participants’ perspectives on a change they led.

Table 4 shows the mapping of the survey questions to the research questions:

**Table 4: Research Questions Mapped to Survey Questions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What <em>factors</em> trigger a “go” moment in leaders initiating a radical change in an organization?</td>
<td>1, 2, 4, 5, 10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What <em>risks</em> do change agents perceive to themselves in leading radical organizational change?</td>
<td>3, 5, 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What are the resulting personal and professional <em>impacts</em> on the change agent?</td>
<td>6, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In developing the research questions and assessing why this study was worth spending valuable time on, I began to see the core problem emerge. My review of the literature framed around the scope of the research confirmed the gap in the study of the dynamics of change through the eyes of the change agent rather than the processual treatment the subject of change typically receives.

**Research Scope**

To focus the project’s lens, I examined in the literature review the broad topic of transformational leadership as a category of leadership in general. I then examined radical change as a subcategory of the types of changes organizations must deal with. This was a key distinction in the research, as most of what has been written concerns the field of planned change. This distinction significantly limited the scope and emphasized more radical changes that affect the core of an organization’s values, processes, structure, products, and services. Limiting the scope helped identify a specific type of change agent who experienced the process of choosing to initiate and lead such an effort and the consequences of doing so.
Through the literature review, I identified some of these types of changes and change agents but did not reveal much about the lived experiences at the onset of the initiative and as the change unfolded.

I explored the specific phenomenon of the triggers and the consequences change agents experienced in the context of implementing lean/agile product development approaches in the software and system development sector. As described by Pelrine (2011), agile represents a new paradigm in the truest sense: It represents a complete abandonment of previously tried-and-true methods. It is a revolution in thinking, behaving, and interacting, and it is one of the responses that leaders choose in dealing with this complex context. As Snowden and Boone (2007) identified, lean/agile is a way of performing “probe-sense-respond” in complex environments.

Given my experiences and those of many colleagues who have been in similar situations in the software development and information technology fields, which are going through a series of radical changes, I saw the opportunity to gather qualitative data from people who have been through these types of changes since the turn of the 21st century.

**Research Method and Researcher Bias**

The qualitative strategy of inquiry provided a phenomenological view of the change agent’s mind-set (Groenewald, 2004). The epistemological position for this study was that (a) the data were contained within the perspectives of people who are involved in RTC and (b) as the researcher I would be engaged with participants in collecting the data. I selected the descriptive research method to describe the characteristics of an existing phenomenon in its real-world context (Yin, 2014). In this study, the phenomenon was the change agent’s trigger for taking on a change initiative and how he or she experienced the effects.
Groenewald (2004) provided a thorough description of the phenomenological design, which I chose for its focus on the lived experience of the participants and the researcher. He asserted that the aim of the researcher is to describe the phenomenon and refrain from any preconceptions but remain true to the facts. He maintained that phenomenologists are concerned with understanding the social and psychological phenomenon from the perspective of the people involved with the issue being researched. Englander (2012) stated that the researcher knows all about the phenomenon beforehand, which is legitimate for this type of research approach.

The sampling method for this study was purposive. The participants were selected based on my knowledge of their experiences leading radical change, which fit with the purpose of this research. Groenewald (2004: 45) defined purposive (nonprobability) sampling as a way to select primary participants by looking for those who “have had experiences relating the phenomenon to be researched.” The selected sample was based on my judgment and the purpose of the research. Englander (2012) suggested that when it comes to selecting subjects for phenomenological research, the researcher must ask, Do you have the experience I am looking for? The participants in this study had to have served as the primary leader of a radical change and had to have experienced some type of consequence as a result.

The population for this study consisted of 19 individuals who had led major radical change efforts in their present or past organizations. According to Boyd (2001), between 2 and 10 participants are sufficient to reach saturation. Creswell (1998: 65, 113) recommended “long interviews with up to 10 people” for a phenomenological study. The follow-up interviews were conducted with survey participants until they no longer produced new perspectives on the topic. The follow-up interviews, conducted via phone, were unstructured,
with questions that helped the participants focus on their experiences, feelings, and thoughts about their behavior around the theme of RTC. Participants were engaged in conversation in which they shared their experiences. My similar background helped open the exchange and facilitated their ability to dig deeper into their experiences (Bailey, 1996). The participants led their organizations through a change to agile product development practices (Highsmith, 2002; Schwaber & Beedle, 2002), representing a major shift, primarily in the field of software product development. This change fit all the criteria of RTC, as described in the literature review (Chapter 2). Pelrine (2011) identified how Scrum, one of the agile practices, aligns with Snowden and Boone’s (2007) Cynefin framework in the complex context. Scrum has a continuous probe-sense-respond approach as a way of dealing with complex product development contexts.

The source of participants was my LinkedIn contact list (www.linkedin.com/in/bobschatz) of more than 3,000 people, primarily from the information technology field. This population contained many people who have been involved in major change efforts, which fit the domain being researched. The ease of contacting people this way made this group of people my primary population from which to draw. These people were all connected to me in a professional sense, and as with any social media context, I interacted with a small portion of these people on a somewhat regular basis. I created a survey (see Appendix A) in SurveyMonkey (www.surveymonkey.com) and began data collection on March 5, 2018. The strategy I used was to identify people from my list who had the experience I was looking for and with whom I had had some discussion previously. My goal was to obtain deeper responses by interviewing people with whom I had established a rapport due to our shared experience.
I contacted 25 people who had led radical changes in their organizations and made a personal appeal to them to complete the online survey. There was a mix of men \((n = 20)\) and women \((n = 5)\). These people were middle- to senior-level managers, but none were C-level executives. In this sense, they were high enough to suggest and drive a change but not at the level to demand a change. This allowed me to study their experiences of the reactions from peers, subordinates, and superiors. I provided an introductory statement to describe the purpose of the research (see Appendix A). Participants had 2 weeks to complete the survey, and I sent out a reminder at the beginning of the second week. The survey remained anonymous in that I did not request the identity of the respondents as part of the survey; I assured them that neither their personal identity nor the identity of their organization would be used in the dissertation.

Most of the participants were based in the United States, but 5 of the requests were submitted to people currently located in Europe. Because the change in the software industry has been global, most of these participants would have had similar experiences to those in the United States. By the time data collection concluded on June 7, 2018, there were 19 completed surveys, a 76% response rate. The respondents were mainly from the United States \((n = 18)\); others were Americans working in European companies abroad \((n = 1)\). Follow-up interviews with 6 respondents were conducted via phone to explore some of the responses and dive in a little deeper with some unstructured conversation about the change they led and how it affected them. The 6 respondents were all male. I chose the 6 people for follow-up interviews based on the depth of their questionnaire responses. The responses that demonstrated a deeper understanding of their internal experience of the phenomenon seemed like they would produce the best data.
**Data Analysis**

I gathered qualitative data in the form of detailed notes through the survey and follow-up phone interviews. During the interviews, I captured in my notes what I heard from the participants, as well as the thoughts and experiences I was having while collecting and reflecting on the data. I manually analyzed the raw data to search for patterns and common themes in participants’ responses.

I made several important choices in the data collection. I considered using electronic recording and analysis in the phone interviews but decided against it. The reasoning behind this choice was that participants would have to be told they were being recorded. From my experience with interviews, this changes the manner in which I respond, and I am more guarded. Knowing that I had to encourage the participants to engage deeply, I chose a more conversational interview approach, using my similar experiences as a way to break the ice with them quickly. The process I used was consistent with Creswell’s (2014) standard protocol, as shown in Figure 10. Although depicted as a linear process, it is much more iterative and recursive in practice. It begins with the specifics of each response or interview and moves to general themes using multiple levels of analysis. The content, presented in Chapter 4, consisted of the integrated thoughts and statements of feelings that participants had expressed in both the questionnaire and the interviews.

I took the following steps to process the raw data and extract themes (Creswell, 2014):

*Step 1: Organize data.* For this step, I used the basic data management capability provided by SurveyMonkey. I also used handwritten notes to capture information during the follow-up phone interviews with some of the participants.
Figure 10: Data Analysis in Qualitative Research

Step 2: Examine data. This provided a general sense of what the respondents thought about their experiences, including common ideas, feelings, and thoughts, as well as whether some responses stood out from others in the data. I scanned my notes and stored them via electronic means or maintain them in a journal.

Step 3: Begin coding data. The coding process involves categorizing topics found in the data (Saldaña, 2016; Tesch, 2013). This is an iterative process of letting codes and relationships emerge. I began organizing all of the responses by research question and taking each response and identifying the phrases that they used to express thoughts they had or feelings they encountered as they lived through the experience of the change.
Step 4: Generate themes and descriptions. This step involves identifying information about people, places, and events to develop a limited number of themes. Utilizing these themes and specific quotes from participants helped shape the interwoven descriptions I used in Chapters 4 and 5.

Step 5: Interrelate themes and descriptions. In this step, I created the qualitative narrative to show how the themes and descriptions formed ideas about what could be interpreted in the collection of data and analysis.

Step 6: Identify what was learned. This is the most important step in the analytical process, where researchers interpret their findings based on an understanding of their own experiences and the literature and theory they have reviewed. The results of this step suggest new ways of looking at a phenomenon or developing new questions for further research on a topic. Through this exploration, meanings emerge, and it becomes clearer how organizations can benefit from what was learned in the study.

In considering the issue of the validity of qualitative data, I used a set of strategies to ensure accuracy in the research (Creswell, 2014). First, I used member checking with some of the participants to determine if they felt the findings were accurate and representative of the data they provided. The participants did not receive the raw data but rather the specific descriptions and themes discovered in the process. I collected their comments and included them in findings as necessary. Second, a rich, thick description conveys the essence of the findings. The idea of a good description is to use the context in which participants found themselves and how they described their situation to create a sense of empathy and put the reader in the mind-set of the participant. Third, the bias of the researcher is clarified. Having been in the position of a radical change agent, I found that self-reflection drove my interest in this research; therefore, I have provided an open interpretation of the data that is shaped by
those experiences. The key in a phenomenological study is to be transparent about bias and where it may be in play. However, as described above, the experience of the researcher is key to interpreting the experiences of others who have been in similar situations.

Summary

My goal in this chapter was to outline the research method used to answer the research questions. A discussion of the procedure, study participants, data collection, and interview questions outlined the specifics of how the study was conducted and who participated in the study. I used a qualitative strategy of inquiry to provide a phenomenological view of the mind-set of an RTC agent. I used a purposive sampling method, as it was important to focus on participants who had actually led RTC. The method employed a questionnaire survey and follow-up phone interviews. In this chapter, I addressed my bias and how it fit in with the interpretation of the data, which focused on the lived experiences of participants dealing with this phenomenon. There were 19 people who became the participants in this study, and this provided enough data to conduct the analysis to support the research questions. My goal in Chapter 4 is to provide the study results and demonstrate that I followed the methodology described in Chapter 3.
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

As I stated in Chapter 1, this study was designed to examine the lived experiences of change agents who drove RTC in their organizations. I organized this chapter to focus on the three research questions captured by the 10-question survey described in Chapter 3. My goals were as follows: (a) to explore change agents’ firsthand thoughts on why they chose to lead the change and the factors they felt led them there, (b) to identify the risks and rewards they may have recognized as they considered driving the change, and (c) to record their assessment of what transpired as a result. By highlighting specific participant observations and establishing common themes, I hoped to understand RTC through their lived experiences.

Respondent Characteristics

From my LinkedIn contact list of more than 3,000 people, primarily from the information technology field, I contacted 25 people who had led radical changes in their organization and asked them to complete a survey (see Appendix A). The survey allowed them to explore their thoughts and feelings as they experienced the phenomenon.

Of this targeted group, 19 participants completed the survey questions. All had led major radical change efforts in their present organization or a past organization. I conducted follow-up interviews via telephone with 6 respondents to more deeply explore responses using unstructured conversation about the change they led and how it affected them. I did not limit interviews by time; rather, I continued holding interviews until they no longer produced new perspectives on the topic.

Survey respondents were primarily based in the United States. One person was working at European company abroad. Because the change in the software industry has been
a global industry change, most have had similar experiences. The number of participants was small because the purpose was not to sample from a large population but rather to deeply understand the experiences of a few targeted and representative radical transformative leaders. Concerning this qualitative approach to research, Boyd (2001) noted that between 2 and 10 participants are sufficient to reach saturation. In terms of direct interviewing, Creswell (1998: 65, 113) recommended “long interviews with up to 10 people” as appropriate for a phenomenological study.

**Coding Categories**

As presented in Table 4 and reproduced below, the 10 survey questions were mapped to the research questions. The telephone interviews generated additional explanations and meanings about RTC that expanded understanding of these experiences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research question</th>
<th>Survey questions</th>
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<td>6, 7, 8, 9</td>
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**Findings and Themes Table of Contents**

For easy reference, Table 5 presents an overview of this chapter’s key findings and themes, along with the corresponding page number for each section.

**Factors That Triggered Change Agent**

The first research question was, What factors trigger a “go” moment in leaders initiating a radical change in an organization? Survey questions mapped to this question included 1, 2, 4, 5, and 10. Based on their responses to the survey and the interviews, the following factors were reported as responsible for the respondents being in a position to
Table 5: Research Findings Table of Contents

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make a radical change. In the interviews, they were asked to put themselves back in a time when they had to decide whether to act or continue following the status quo with everyone else. They were asked to think about what they considered as part of the decision. I categorized the responses into themes that emerged from data collection.

**Experiential factors.** The experiential factors I identified were (a) formative personal experiences, (b) personality, (c) training/mentorship, (d) positive work experiences, (e) negative work experiences, and (f) every action has an equal and opposite reaction.

**Formative personal experiences.** Some respondents’ answers illustrated deep, personal experiences that shaped their thought processes.

- Respondent #16 reported his father taught him to risk everything for something he believed in, and that in turn taught him the value of surrounding himself with supporters: “Family and friends are always supportive, need good people that can calibrate your bad and low days.”

For others, taking on significant responsibilities at a young age or facing a life-threatening situation forged a tendency to work hard and face problems head-on:

- Respondent #15’s parents divorced when he was young. His father was an alcoholic. He was the oldest child and felt he had to “take the torch and run with it,” becoming the father figure in the family. His family was on welfare and to him that meant failure, so he always felt the need to outwork everyone else. He
worked very hard through tough situations his whole life. This put things in perspective with respect to problems at work: Work crises are not always life crises.

- Respondent #18 noted, “In my younger years, I was always a smaller child. I had to learn to stand up for myself. My parents divorced, and I had an abusive father.”
- Respondent #6 wrote, “I almost died and had a very difficult recovery. I kept working as much as I could because what I was doing had value and I knew I was the only one that could drive it. Knowing of the difficulties I had, motivated a lot of folks to keep going. They saw how I used difficulty to drive change.”

Such deeply personal experiences are rarely divulged in interviews or in participants’ daily interactions with coworkers, but they strongly influence how these people behave and make decisions. March (1994) argued that people’s identity—their personal history—is crucial to how they apply rules to a situation and make decisions. Therefore, changes can be perceived differently based on life experiences, and the willingness to accept change may stem from these past experiences. The change agent may not recognize how others see the change as drastic, as change agents place necessary work changes in the context of greater life challenges and the work changes typically pale in comparison. Change agents are strongly driven by purpose, but that drive may make those implementing the change uncomfortable.

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**Personality.** Though people coming into organizations as “hired guns” to lead change know they might not last long, they tend to recognize that they have a special personality trait that others do not have. They see a need for change before others do and are willing to act on it. This echoes Weber’s (1947) definition of charisma as an inborn trait that allows some people to be treated as leaders, as well as Garcia’s (1996) description of radical change
agents as people with the passion and special capability to lead. The results supported this idea:

- Respondent #17 noted he had “a mind-set to continually improve and push the envelope. . . . Somewhere along the way in my career I discovered I had an ability to drive change in people and help people improve personally and professionally, and to get teams to work better together and produce better or more efficient outcomes.”

- Respondent #15 said, “It’s just me. I want to leave a place in better conditions than when I got there.”

- “I have always been an out-of-the-box thinker.” (Respondent #3)

- “I think that this is just the way I am.” (Respondent #9)

Respondents demonstrated the tendency to move forward, facing their own—and the organization’s—fears of failing. These people seem willing to face the fear of failure rather than allow conditions to remain the same, as several respondents suggested.

- Respondent #15 noted a “fear of failure” contributed to need for change.

- Respondent #7 admitted, “Fear of failure was there for sure. . . . The amount of trust and hope that was put into this transformation really made the fear of failure tangible.”

When changes are needed, organizations may not seek out individuals who say they have these traits, as they might be seen as irrational people who will recklessly drive unwanted change. Staff or management may see this as a threat or as disruptive to the way they customarily work. Gino and Staats (2015) asserted that organizations hobble themselves by failing to reflect on their shortcomings and wanting people to toe the line rather than pursue learning or new solutions—realities most certainly brought to bear by a change agent.
Rogers (1995) suggested that radical changes create fear and concern that breed resistance. It would stand to reason that if change agents were open about their penchant for driving change, even through intense criticism and unpopularity, the organization would likely not bring that person in for fear of what he or she might do, regardless of the imperative to change. As such, resistance begins to form before a change agent is even in an organization.

*Training/mentorship.* Although change agents may always be poised for leading a big change, they often cannot execute at that level all the time. There are ebbs and flows throughout their careers. Often, they are influenced to activate through a mentor, who ignites an awareness of the need to act, or a challenge put forth by a thought leader in their field:

- Respondent #13 first realized that he was a change agent when “I was attending an agile coaching class . . . in the fall of 2012. I had been a project and program manager for a large software company . . . for many years. I had attended some initial scrum training . . . in 2009 and immediately began hacking the existing project management and software development practices and procedures within my own product teams.”

- Respondent #18 was “influenced by a master’s program guest speaker many years ago. . . . The speaker was talking about group think and social dynamics. He showed a video of the [space] shuttle blowing up and simply said, ‘This is your company unless you change.’”

- Respondent #14 was challenged by a thought leader in his industry. “My newly found mentor, an agile thought leader . . . warned me that I would risk termination because the concepts likely would be viewed by senior management as radical and perhaps even hostile to the organization’s structure and culture.”
Conditions that are ripe for a change agent and the ensuing moments of activation cannot be planned (Chapman, 2002; O’Hara-Devereaux, 2004). Change agents themselves determine if there is something worth taking the risk for. Cramm (2009) argued that as a change agent, “you have to be willing to die in order to thrive”—whether something about the problem is a trigger for them (and if they can recognize it) and whether they are inspired or motivated to be the change leader for a particular change at a particular point in time.

When organizations spend money to train employees in change leadership, there is a slight chance that all conditions will converge to create a true change agent. Carlyle (1841) argued that a leader’s authority comes from legitimacy and trust, both of which stem from the leader’s ability to inspire or their personal charisma, not from training or other external pressures. These factors are outside the control of the organization and the program designs for change leadership and leadership development.

Positive work experiences. Seeing change succeed and getting an organization and its people in a better position created a special feeling for responding change agents:

- Respondent #11’s role came about when he “began coaching two teams in 2008 as an informal addition to my role as testing manager. We had success with local teams . . . (left alone by . . . HQ, and with the . . . director’s support) between 2008 and substantially into early 2013.”

- Respondent #14’s journey to change leadership was more of an epiphany: “It was after my first experience with Scrum in May 2004 that I realized that Scrum’s empirical, iterative, and incremental approach was much better suited for work that largely resided in the complex and complicated domains. The organization continued to advocate approaches better suited for the obvious/simple domain—those based upon predictability and best practices. My continued use of Scrum
throughout 2004 and 2005 reinforced my sense that Scrum or other empirical, iterative, and incremental approaches were better alternatives for our complex and complicated work.”

- “Every transformation I worked on, except one, got good results and that motivated me to keep doing it.” (Respondent #6)
- “Experience told me to be patient and trust my skills.” (Respondent #11)
- Respondent #18 rationalized, “I try to be confident, let go of fear. I can always get another job.”

Small successes can be great motivators to continue to drive change or to attempt to try it in another situation. Avolio et al. (1991) wrote that transformational leadership is fueled by vision, whereas Bennis (1983) argued that successful leaders of RTC create a compelling vision for their followers. As the visions of these respondents became reality, it fueled the change agents to keep going.

Negative work experiences. As a converse to positive experience motivators, some of the respondents were motivated by negative experiences, looking to make sure that something they had seen or experienced in a prior situation never happened again:

- Respondent #5’s outlook on change was shaped by experiences “at a defense contractor that was strictly waterfall. It was miserable.”

In other cases, the experience of having people resist a proposed change added fuel to the change agent’s fire:

- Respondent #10 was “openly perceived as a trouble maker and a bit of a crazy person.”
- Respondent #18 knew he had a reputation as a “trouble maker” and someone prone to “upsetting the apple cart.”
• Respondent #13 “struggled with existing command and control issues, which were embedded in my own behaviors as a project manager. As we began to stand up teams using Scrum, I consciously adopted the servant leader role of the Scrum master. However, I often found myself reverting to old command and control techniques.”

*Every action has an equal and opposite reaction.* Researchers tend to think of this concept in terms of the forces resisting change, but the same often holds true for the people driving the change. RTC naturally breeds resistance against the change agent (Blanchard, 2009), which manifests itself through processes, politics, or even personal attacks. These change agents seemed to be motivated to proceed by the negative reactions of their detractors. Without that doubt or tough experience to use for motivation, it is quite possible that these respondents would not have been as eager to drive change or as effective in the execution.

*Situational factors.* The situational factors I identified were as follows: (a) it was my job, (b) recognized the need for change, (c) wanted to tackle a big challenge, (d) seized opportunity, and (e) why not?

*It was my job.* Motivation to drive change does not have to come from formative personal experience or entrenched personality traits. It can come, instead, from the needs of the work at hand. Many change agents—more than 80%, according to Tushman et al. (1986)—are externally recruited and specifically brought in by higher-level executives or even a board of directors to change the way things are done:

• Respondent #15 was “hired to change an organization with legacy products and unhappy customers.” For a different organization, he was “hired to change a legacy product organization.”
“I was hired into the organization as vice president of product development and had responsibility for leading the development and QA groups.” (Respondent #8)

Others were asked to take on the role from inside the company:

- Some change agents, like Respondent #16, have broad responsibilities. “Me and another leader had been tasked to transition a traditional software development shop that had developers that had been in that setting for up 13 years to a fully engaged agile setting using both Scrum and Kanban process frameworks. . . . Working under the COO umbrella, I am tasked with expanding the knowledge of Agile Scrum and Kanban principles and agile strategic planning.”

- Respondent #15’s COO/CEO implored him to “shake things up” because the company was struggling financially.

- Respondent #5 had to lead change amid the chaos of a corporate merger. “Two companies combined as part of a merger. Each used different project management methodologies. One of them used Agile Scrum, and we integrated the two companies using Agile Scrum.”

Their past experiences and skills as change agents are valuable to organizations in much need of help. These hired guns come in without the baggage and relationships that might cause insiders to hesitate. They’re often called “outsiders within,” combining an insider’s knowledge with an outsider’s long view (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and are tasked with bringing the organization back to a level that can satisfy customers and achieve success. Due to being tagged as the hero or savior, these change agents often romanticize the role and forget to ask key questions about what kind of support they will get or what type of resistance they may face. They do not know how to assess the organization’s appetite for change or the breadth and depth of pain everyone is willing to endure to gain the benefits of
change. This is echoed by Watkins (2013: 27), who stated, “If you’re not thoughtful in adapting to the new situation, you could end up being attacked by the organizational immune system and rejected.” Jerome and Powell (2016) backed this up statistically, with roughly two-thirds of surveyed change agents saying they faced political resistance.

**Recognized the need for change.** Many respondents indicated that they reached a point where they recognized the need to change. This did not seem to be a fast-switch moment; rather they were prodded by management. Tushman et al. (1986) stressed that executives recognizing the need for change is a necessary catalyst—or reaching an internal tolerance level where they could no longer accept the status quo:

- A senior vice president (SVP) asked Respondent #14, “How did you do this?” and “Can you do it on another larger, more critical project?” These were VUCA projects, and the SVP wanted the change to be predictive—a complete contradiction. The respondent sent the SVP a list of “demands” and would only agree move forward if the SVP met the demands and provided support for removing obstacles. The SVP agreed, giving the respondent a green light to move forward.

- Respondent #14 also admitted, “I was exasperated and disenchanted with the traditional approaches we used towards projects and product development. Those were largely predicated upon accurate predictions and stability in requirements and processes. Our experiences over a number of years revealed that none of those things were largely accurate or consistent. It was after my first experience with Scrum in May 2004 that I realized that Scrum’s empirical, iterative, and incremental approach was much better suited for work that largely resided in the complex and complicated domains. The organization continued to advocate
approaches better suited for the obvious/simple domain—those based upon predictability and best practices. My continued use of Scrum throughout 2004 and 2005 reinforced my sense that Scrum or other empirical, iterative, and incremental approaches were better alternatives for our complex and complicated work.”

Nadler (1998) described the real challenge of leadership as risking one’s credibility and status to tackle tough problems. These change agents appeared to go through some inner negotiation where they must decide to initiate something or continue with the way things are and hope someone else rises up:

- Respondent #2 saw things in terms of rebellion: “As I tried to survive/manage the change of values due to the new leadership regime, I built a rebel alliance—like-minded folks to try to keep things alive.”

- Respondent #4 said, “I figured I’d take a fall at some point but still thought it was the right decision for the company and my staff, so I was not concerned and was determined to do the right thing.”

- Respondent #8 thought the company was out of options: “I’m a big-picture and mission-oriented person, and I couldn’t see any way for us to achieve our mission of ensuring the future viability of the business without introducing big change.”

Once the respondents decided to move forward, they immediately began building a coalition of like-minded people looking to join the revolution. This is the moment where they had to come to terms with the possible risks of stepping out of the social norms that keep everyone in line and with the tribe, a process outlined in Weber et al.’s (2004) conceptual framework for decision-making in social dilemmas.
Wanted to tackle a big challenge. Many respondents liked the idea of working on a big opportunity that required a different approach than what they and their organization were used to:

- Respondent #14 embraced the “very challenging and strategically important project that needed to get done.”

- Respondent #13 said, “The initial challenges I faced were largely around technology obstacles, as much of what we were working with were legacy technologies (including mainframes). However, those challenges soon began to pale in comparison to the cultural challenges that were emerging along with some of the new agile practices.” The same respondent also admitted, “Leaving friends behind was difficult, but an opportunity to learn about how small startup organizations function, explore modern technologies, and be a part of a growing organization again was something I couldn’t pass up.”

Seized opportunity. Other respondents helped lay the groundwork over time, and jumped on the opportunity for change when it eventually presented itself:

- Respondent #12 said his company had been diligent and had “established business reasons for change, metrics, appropriate levels of awareness and training etc. In the beginning there was a lot of skepticism but that quickly gave way to enthusiasm and excitement.”

Some felt a level of support from others around them, from above, below, and from peers. Those who had that support and encouragement were quick to point out the positive difference that made:
• Respondent #1 said, “I truly believe in the process and have a support and encouragement of many knowledgeable employees that are dedicated to success of the company.”

• Respondent #8 was “heartened by the support and encouragement I got from my peers who confirmed the need for drastic change.”

• Respondent #7 said, “Getting approval for funding for agile training was the ‘go’ moment. . . . Getting buy-in from our exec[utive] team and learning that the CEO would participate in training was also a huge ‘go’ moment.”

These two categories highlight the window of opportunity that change agents might see in RTC. Weick and Quinn (1999) suggested that change agents are drawn to their work by solving previously unsolvable problems or taking advantage of an enticing opportunity that cannot be satisfied by sticking to the status quo. Conger (1989) proposed that because change agents are typically filled with optimism and a sense of opportunity, entrepreneurial environments are fertile conditions for RTC. These respondents believed that perhaps such pointed opportunism would generate a great deal of learning that would be valuable to them now and for their future career prospects. Proving they can take on a big challenge, rise up, and lead others through a change not only helps the organization, but it also can be a career boost if successful.

Despite the potential personal benefit, when a door for change opens, it still takes some level of courage to go through it. Burns (1978) described revolutionary leaders as passionate, dedicated, and courageous, among other things, and instilled with the skill and charisma to capitalize on the opportunity for change. The respondents had qualities similar to these.
Why not? Many change agents felt the need to act because they had reached their threshold and felt like there was no other path that they could live with, so they “just went for it” and accepted the associated risks:

- Respondent #7 admitted to not considering the consequences: “I didn’t think about detailed implications or whether I would be fired if it failed.”
- Similarly, Respondent #17 “didn’t think much about the personal risks since I’ve always functioned in the mode of figuring out what was needed to succeed and then executing—what other way is there?”
- Feeling confident in his abilities, Respondent #6 “just went for it in 2016 because I felt I had enough experience to make a positive impact.”
- “Once I start, there’s nothing to lose.” (Respondent #16)
- Respondent #11 put the change in a nonwork perspective: “I was unemployed when I started this . . . so nothing to lose by trying.”
- Respondent #14 was told, “You’re either the dumbest or craziest person to want to do this. You’re going to run against everything the company stands for.”

While these respondents took an approach that seemed like throwing caution to the wind, they don’t appear to be reckless. They seem much more calculated in their thinking, creating a safe space for themselves and trying to minimize the value they placed on what they had, which allowed for “letting go,” so there was nothing left to do but move forward. These types of leaders are keen to challenge processes and learn from their mistakes, valuable qualities that Kouzes and Posner (1987, 2002) include in their model of five practices that effective leaders use to garner results.
**Negative consequence avoidance.** The factors related to negative consequence avoidance that I identified were (a) customer concerns, (b) current organizational environment not sustainable, and (c) avoid self-destruction.

**Customer concerns.** As is often the case, change can be initiated due to problems with customers. One of the respondents was brought into the organization for the specific purpose of creating change because the customers were extremely unhappy:

- Respondent #15 reported he was “hired to change an organization with legacy products and unhappy customers” and to fix the organization’s “inability to consistently deliver customer value. . . . Products were late and often missed the mark on user expectations.” He had a moment of epiphany “when I found myself on a late-night phone call with a big client who couldn’t get our software to work. Yet another defect, patch, and yet another weekend of working and trying not to drown.”

**Current organizational environment not sustainable.** Moments of desperation fueled by customer dissatisfaction can be great motivators for change, and many change agents responded that they were hired or promoted with the mandate to change internal business practices and processes to help fulfill customer expectations:

- Respondent #15 said, “The development process flow was nonexistent.”
- Respondent #3 saw the long-term benefits: “Many of our problems were linked to something that newer processes promised to change.”
- Respondent #8 was “hired to lead a development organization for a software product business unit where there was a legacy of long development cycles, acrimony between dev, QA, product management, and customer support groups, resulting in a faltering legacy product. The company desired to create a next
generation software solution to replace the legacy solution for both technological, quality, and functional reasons. . . . It seemed pretty obvious that things needed to change and to change in a big way.”

- Respondent #4 felt a sense of urgency. “Something had to be done, and I recall a particular moment after I’d done some study about what this agile method was all about, and it very suddenly became clear that this was for sure the right course, not just for my organization, but all organizations that wanted to be successful would need to change.” The same respondent also said, “As we started, I was very concerned about making any changes, but at the same time knew we had to do something. The path we were on was not going to be successful and the pace of business was accelerating much more quickly than I could make changes to impact our business positively.”

- Respondent #2 knew he had to “go for change, or go for the exit.”

In today’s business environment, the customer is certainly in the driver’s seat. Businesses and individuals depend heavily on software for all aspects of business and personal life, so customer expectations, especially for software products, have become increasingly demanding. As customers become more and more frustrated with a product or service, the bleeding cannot be stopped, and it demands drastic measures that metaphorical Band-Aids will not remedy. This places a heavy burden to produce products and provide services with much more speed and quality than has been expected in earlier decades, and the inability to meet customer needs and expectations will destroy a company if it cannot turn its situation around, which has put more pressure on companies to grow quickly to keep pace (Friedman, 2016; Kotter, 2014). Organizations, regardless of industry or sector, must find ways to engage their customers and continuously learn and improve to meet a growing
demand for speed, quality, and function. This puts tremendous pressure on workers within
the organization (Mostert, 2014), who serve as catalysts for change.

*Avoid self-destruction.* Sometimes the respondents had to drive change not just to
satisfy customers but also to save the organization from certain obsolescence:

- Respondent #16 wrote, “The desire to move towards that change was evident by
the ever-growing risks of continuing to go into a direction that was self-
destructing towards either a segment of the business or the entire operation.”

- To Respondent #8, “the status quo was a massive failure and the business unit
was going nowhere fast. That’s why they hired me, and in my mind the risk of not
changing how we do things was much greater and more menacing than the risk of
failing at the change.”

- “My drive to affect change comes from knowing what is possible, and yet seeing
such dysfunction and waste . . . and unhappy people.” (Respondent #11)

The respondents recognized that, first, continuing to do things “the way we do it
here” will destroy a segment or an entire operation of a business. Amis et al. (2004) and
Doyle (2001) noted that more people are attempting change as a means to mitigate the
burdens on individuals or teams, which causes stress that affects performance. The current
state of pain and dysfunction is also high. However, this does not have to continue; the
organization is just getting in its own way of becoming more than it is, and if advancement
could happen, both employees and customers would be much happier. O’Hara-Devereaux
(2004) wrote, “Putting an end to what no longer works is the first phase of any transition, and
it is sure to be painful.”

*Altruistic motivators.* The altruistic motivators I identified were (a) company/other
people, (b) personal responsibility, (c) belief in self and process, and (d) enthusiasm.
Company/other people. For a subset of change agent respondents, leading change tapped into an inner mission to lead people to a better place:

- Respondent #11 said his need to push change was driven by “compassion for people.”
- Respondent #4 said, “It has been an entire lifetime of learning in my career. . . . The biggest lesson I’ve learned is humility, to care more about the people and the company than yourself, let that take care of itself.”
- Respondent #8 was “excited at the opportunity to improve both the productivity and enjoyment of the workplace for so many people in this business unit (not just in my group, but in my peers’ groups as well).” The same respondent also said, “I wanted to create an environment where people could grow and enjoyed participating in growing the business.”
- Respondent #19 involved his staff in the process. “At a staff meeting, I asked everyone in the room if they enjoyed the way the office and projects in general were being run. No surprise, not a single person in the office raised their hand. So, I looked around the room and asked, who would like to try a different approach?”
- Respondent #18 reported feeling an intrinsic need “to help people become more than what they are.”
- Respondent #17 described himself as people-focused, interested in helping people, and wanting to “bring them with me. . . . I just went for it in 2016 because I felt I had enough experience to make a positive impact.”

The humility of a leader—the selflessness to consider one’s followers before oneself and the mission to make people and an organization better—can be a great positive motivation for change. Opening up to the possibilities, being able to share a vision with
others, and engaging them in an improvement journey is truly a life-changing experience. Avolio et al. (1991) described these traits in their Four I’s Model of Transformational Leadership, which includes “inspirational motivation,” where leaders are driven by vision and inspire followers to reach a common goal.

**Personal responsibility.** Some responses highlighted a strong feeling of personal responsibility or mission orientation to drive change:

- Respondent #9 “started with the mission to improve the ability to deliver of the organization.”
- Respondent #18 stated that it is “the leader’s responsibility to create an environment of change.”
- Respondent #11 was driven by “the engineer in me that likes to make things that work, and that people actually use.”
- Respondent #15 felt the need to ensure “that I left things better than I found them.” He said he “just saw of group of talented people who could do better.”
- “We can do better than we are doing now.” (Respondent #9)
- “I can’t feel good about work knowing there’s a better way.” (Respondent #16)

These responses from change agents suggest they are motivated by an intrinsic sense of duty to improve their work environment, the organization’s abilities, and the people they feel responsible for. They cannot sit idly through conditions they feel are less than they could be. If they do not act, then they may suffer from stress and depression from bearing the weight of the organization’s dysfunction on their shoulders. Foucault (1983) borrowed the Greek word *parrhesia* to describe an iconoclastic truth teller whose deep sense of responsibility compels him or her to critique those in power, even at the danger of his or her personal safety. In terms of organizational change, these respondents shared such qualities
and often put themselves at great professional risk by following their instincts and advocating for change when others might sit pat, content to maintain the status quo.

**Belief in self and process.** This group of responses takes the sense of personal responsibility a little further, raising it to a more esoteric form of belief or value system:

- Respondent #17 had cultivated an identity as a facilitator: “Somewhere along the way in my career I discovered I had an ability . . . to get teams to work better together and produce better or more efficient outcomes.”
- Respondent #16 had a “strong sense of faith.”
- Respondent #1 said, “I truly believe in the process and have the support and encouragement of many knowledgeable employees that are dedicated to success of the company.”
- “My drive to affect change comes from knowing what is possible.” (Respondent #11)

For Respondent #16, this was tied very closely to sense of religious faith. But even respondents who did not mention religious beliefs reported feeling they could see possibilities that others could not, and they felt strangely compelled to act with the intention of turning the organization in their mind into a reality for everyone involved—a desired future that Gharajedaghi (2011) called “the vision.” This belief is ultimately as pragmatic as it is aspirational, as without “the vision,” Gharajedaghi argued, an organization going through change is likely to experience chaos or fail outright.

**Enthusiasm.** It is critically important that change leaders have within themselves, and can convey to others, a deep sense of enthusiasm, energy, and passion for a radical change:
• Respondent #16 expressed that without passion, the work is difficult: “My passion drives my effectiveness, I got the bug . . . I have to understand [a ‘go’ moment] and be able to articulate it; the passion has to be there.”

• Respondent #17 wrote, “It’s exciting to find better ways to do things, to innovate, to see the outcomes of team collaboration and the benefits to the business and our customers.” The same respondent found “excitement for the opportunity to improve. . . . I saw a lot of opportunity to improve and was excited because I knew how to get the team there.”

• Respondent #11 wanted to know his work inside and out: “When I was asked to develop and deliver agile training in 2013, I felt inspired to do it well and learn in the process . . . learn more about agile transformation, as well as learn to teach it.”

Notably, the enthusiasm must be genuine, as followers can see right through a false or insincere façade:

• Respondent #4 said he “was determined to do the right thing.”

• Similarly, Respondent #7 “felt excited and that we were doing the right thing. I felt motivated and eager to come to work each day to see how the change was adopted and to help as much as possible to make it succeed.”

• “I felt driven to push the change because I had local support and success.”

(Respondent #11)

• Respondent #15 described the feeling of leading change as “elation”: “We were going to change the world!”

In the end, the respondents’ enthusiasm guided their work, even through self-doubt:
• Respondent #18 lamented the fact that he could not rest on his laurels:

“Sometimes I think, why can’t I be one of the people that just likes (or tolerates) the status quo?”

Followers look for enthusiasm in leadership, and the speed of change can be affected by the intensity of those characteristics in the change agent. This sense of enthusiasm helps change agents through the tough times as they encounter resistance, and it provides a shield that prevents rejection from thwarting their efforts prematurely. If leadership enthusiasm is sufficiently high, it can create an “escape velocity” that prevents resistance from forming in the first place (Amis et al., 2004; Tushman & Romanelli, 1985).

However, enthusiasm can also have the effect of strengthening resistance because of the Newtonian law of every action creating an equal and opposite reaction. The combination of a highly enthusiastic change agent and a strong opposition usually creates the condition where the change agent is categorized as some “crazy lunatic” who has lost all sense of reality. These change agents sometimes appear blind to the increasing opposition, and their enthusiasm can also become a blindfold preventing them from seeing that the organization is scheming to “kill” them (Blanchard, 2009).

**Risks and Rewards Considered by Change Agent**

The second research question was, What are the perceived risks to change agents leading radical organizational change? This question was mapped to survey questions 3, 5, and 7.

The respondents reported that as change agents, they considered the following when preparing for driving RTC. In some rare cases, the change agents saw a more positive outcome of a reward in the form of promotion opportunities. The following themes emerged from their responses to questions related to this category.
**Anticipated rewards.** As demonstrated in the literature and the data from respondents, these radical changes are tremendously challenging and complex. However, the rewards can be very satisfying. Many respondents said that a successful change would be a worthwhile reward in itself:

- Respondent #1 said, “My reward would be to see the successful transformation.”
- Along the same lines, Respondent #3 said his “reward would be being successful.”
- Respondent #7 said, “The reward of success was being able to work in a more innovative and efficient way, with teams that owned their own work. That was reward enough!”
- With a more business-minded approach, Respondent #15 said, “The rewards were better products and more revenue.”

Others had a more long-term view of potential rewards, including strong interpersonal relationships that blossomed from the change:

- Taking a longer view of the process, Respondent #6 said, “The reward is not doing the transformation; it is making it ‘stick’ after you leave.”
- Respondent #2 said his rewards were “peer bonding” and the “memory of one of the most high-performance teams I had the privilege to serve.”
- Respondent #17 was interested in helping people and wanted to “bring them with me. . . . When you’re in this mode, it takes extra effort, and you don’t want it to fail.”
- Respondent #14 “saw success as beneficial for the company and others, especially people doing development work, and that would be rewarding for me.”
Of course, some also imagined significant boosts in professional acclaim, compensation, or career prospects:

- Respondent #17 “believed I would be rewarded financially and eventually promoted, both of which did happen.”
- Respondent #19 thought that the reward was “getting to ‘live to fight another day.’ I would secure in the mind of my employer the idea that I was a valuable employee and make myself indispensable. In other words, I would achieve the job security my current life circumstances demanded.”

With few exceptions, the rewards that the respondents were after were not about themselves or the money; the financial and professional rewards were a secondary benefit of their change journey. After all, Buchanan et al. (1999) noted that change agents are generally poorly supported, encouraged, or rewarded for their efforts. Their reward was about something bigger than themselves: seeing something through to completion, creating a better work environment, leaving a legacy, and creating better products for customers (Friedman, 2016; Hugos, 2009; Kotter, 2014). In identifying the qualities of transformational leaders, Spinosa et al. (2008) noted that one common trait is a willingness to undertake this difficult work of identifying problems in the organization and modeling a better way for others.

It should be noted that the question asked of the respondents was about expected rewards. Their responses related to what actually happened to them as a radical change agent, which fell far short of the positive experiences they may have expected.

**Known risks.** The factors related to known risks that I identified were (a) job security, (b) personal doubts, (c) failure, (d) lack of staff support, (e) lack of leadership support, and (f) company risks.
Job security. In all these responses, it seems clear that the change agents were very much aware of the risks to their jobs. Some risks were expected to carry short-term consequences:

- Respondent #13 “felt like I needed to embrace the role and I resolved myself to the idea that this role was temporary (along with all other roles that I will fulfill). As a steward for change, my job was to put myself out of a job. I resisted this at first, as I thought as a project and program manager, there would always be more projects and other programs. However, what would I do as a transformation coach, after I helped the organization transform. Would I go back to the program manager role? Not likely, once I went down this road, it was really a one-way street.”

- Respondent #12 would go in with “the assumption that I will work myself out of a job. . . . As an external coach I see things differently—my job is to put myself out of a job with a particular organization not to become a full-time member of the staff.”

- Respondent #15 came to the understanding that he had to “realize that I’m not going to be anywhere for long-term.”

- Respondent #18 said he was always “well aware of the risks of rejection/ejection as a hired change agent.”

- Respondent #11 said his personal risk “was that I eventually would not have a role in the organization. . . . Coaches frequently feel we’ll either be fired for pushing too hard for a proper transformation, or our positions will be eliminated as soon as there is a perception of progress.”
• “If I failed, I was going to be fired. I was told as much by the owner of the company.” (Respondent #19)

• Respondent #14 was warned “that I would risk termination because the concepts likely would be viewed by senior management as radical and perhaps even hostile to the organizations structure and culture.”

Respondents also cited potential risks with more long-term consequences, including financial instability and damage to their professional reputation:

• Respondent #4 knew that leading change “was a risk to my current position and the income to care for my family.”

• Respondent #12 wrote, “What I did do was setup our personal finances so that we could weather any storm. This was the result of a couple of threatened actions over my time at these shops. My preparation included things like paying off all debts, consolidating accounts for visibility, etc.” Failure meant it was “very likely that I will need to find another position in the future.”

• Respondent #9 understood that “Failure would have adversely affected career prospects.”

• Along those lines, Respondent #19 admitted, “I know how bad unexplained gaps look on a resume and a bad reference from a previous boss isn’t a good look either.”

• Respondent #3 said his “punishment was loss of reputation.”

In the end, some of the risk factors eventually got to the respondents:

• Respondent #16 was realistic about the situation: “I was not going to ruin my reputation, the passion was gone, and I left the company.”
• Respondent #11 “returned to the test manager role after a disruptive reorg[anization] with which I was removed from the role leading agile teams.”

• Respondent #5 was aware that “my career was on the line.”

• Likewise, Respondent #16 remembered thinking, “This could be the end of my career.”

Zweibelson (2012) discussed how, in the military, those who speak up for change are often marginalized through obstruction or termination, among other avenues. Although similar consequences exist in private companies, most of these respondents were clearly ready for the consequences that came with the drive to initiate a major change. Notably, the benefits they saw for the company, their coworkers, customers, and the like seemed to outweigh the consequences they saw for themselves. The courage to drive RTC comes from having a “nothing to lose” approach, and these respondents largely did not play it safety by doing only what they knew would not get them fired. Once they decided they were going to lead the change, the respondents seemed to embrace the challenge, consequences and all.

Garcia (1996) applauded the “intestinal fortitude” it takes to lead change mission after change mission and noted that the people who drive that change are themselves driven by passion.

**Personal doubts.** Self-doubt is a frequent visitor to the change agent, and several respondents expressed severe personal doubts before, during, and even after leading change:

• Respondent #6 admitted, “The first transformation gave a bit of insecurity because it was a new ‘thing’ for me.”

• Respondent #5 confessed to having the “fear that I didn’t have the leadership ability to show the way.”
• Respondent #12 knew that “the results would probably not be appreciated ([they] just became the new norm).”

• Respondent #17 “chose to leave a previous position because his ‘obsession’ about changing was affecting his family life. This puts a lot of pressure on the family in addition to what’s happening at work.”

Although the respondents reported they felt like what they were doing was right, there was a voice in their heads telling them to get back in the pack with everyone else where it was safe and constantly asking them if the risk was worth it. Doyle (2002) noted the dangers of not being able to cope with stress and growing disillusioned and cynical in the face of extended change. Being pressured to “go with the flow” at work, combined with the demand to provide for one’s family, can affect a change agent’s emotional well-being and home life as well.

_Failure._ In these responses, there seems to be an acceptance of the risk that changes may fail and the feelings of fear that come with it:

• Respondent #12 “knew that the changes that were wrought were difficult to get through.”

• Respondent #4 understood the uphill battle ahead: “Professionally, at the time, agile was a foreign concept with a foreign vernacular so success was far from certain.”

• Respondent #14 stated, “The concepts likely would be viewed by senior management as radical and perhaps even hostile to the organization’s structure and culture.”

• Respondent #7 wrote, “If we didn’t ‘succeed’ doing agile, then the whole transformation would not necessarily move forward.”
• Respondent #9 was aware that more was on the line than success at one job:
  “Failure would have adversely affected career prospects.”
• Respondent #19 worried about “the blow one’s confidence takes when we
  experience failure.”
• Respondent #3 echoed this sentiment, saying he feared the “risk of failure.”

RTC is a highly impactful process with high failure rates (Amis et al., 2004).
Although fear of failure paralyzes some potential change agents and the risks drive them
back in line, fear of failure did not stop this special group of respondents, who were aware of
the fear but did not let it determine their course of action, or inaction. Kouzes and Posner
(1987, 2002) described successful leaders as people who continually learn and recognize that
failure is part of learning. That wide-lens approach to change may have helped push these
change agents forward in their mission.

Lack of staff support. For change agents, dealing with resistance—knowing everyone
is either against them or, in the best case, just trying to stay clear of them to avoid being
captured as collateral damage—is a strange but familiar feeling:
• Respondent #14 recalled, “When I first proposed the use of Scrum on a small
  product development effort, I was met with skepticism.”
• Remembering the anxiety of the time, Respondent #7 said, “I was worried that the
  entire team would be very skeptical and not open to the new learnings and new
  way of doing things. I had some fear about getting full buy-in from the teams and
  worried that if they didn’t fully buy into the process, it would fail.”
• Respondent #6 detailed the possible issues staff would have with change, with
  “resistance to change and internal corporate politics being the most prevalent.”
• Similarly, Respondent #10 knew, “One major risk was resistance from business process owners, because for some odd reason they felt they had LESS visibility into the work being done on their behalf than they had under a time and materials type of cost-plus contract.”

• “The company’s old guard believed they knew better than customers, were stuck in their story, and didn’t see the need for different approach. This group highly influenced who was considered a player in the organization.” (Respondent #15)

• Respondent #16 said, “There are/were influential people that were resistant to what we were trying to accomplish. . . . Lots of targets on your back. . . . Resistance gets stronger when a small experiment succeeds. The success now means we have to deal with it. People feel insecure in times of change, they get angry at first, so I try to adjust my communication.”

• Respondent #8 “was worried about how much foot dragging the entrenched people would do trying to resist the change, both because it is frustrating to me and because it would get in the way of accomplishing our mission to introduce a new software product to the market. . . . The risk was that the entrenched culture dug their heels in and thwarted the change efforts and the business unit would continue to lose customers and eventually no longer be viable.”

In some cases, early success only seemed to make certain people resist harder. According to Tushman et al. (1996), sweeping, strategic change is difficult for people to adapt to and is often resisted by an organization’s old guard. As these resisters begin to deal with the fact that the change might actually work, they find they need to adapt, and their resistance tends to grow stronger. This lack of support and strong resistance are exhausting for change agents, and it takes a toll on their relationships with people at work. Coworkers
may feel like the suggestion of change is a personal attack against them and may in turn render personal attacks against the change agent with the goal of slowing or stopping the change (Agocs, 1997).

However, should the change ultimately take hold, change agents may find that they hold a grudge against everyone who opposed them during the change. They may also experience some negative feelings for not being recognized for the courage to persevere in the face of strong resistance and knowing that everyone is benefiting from their sacrifice. Nadler (1998) cited the emotional fatigue that can come with lingering feelings of stress. In addition, people may try to take credit for the benefits despite being strong resistors when the change agent was driving the change.

*Lack of leadership support.* In the previous section, the focus was on peers and colleagues putting up resistance, which makes the support of leadership critical. However, as is demonstrated by the responses in this section, executives can be an even stronger force working against the change agent, even if the executives brought the change agent in to drive change in the first place:

- Respondent #3 was wary of “people with higher seniority averse to change.”
- Senior management, according to Respondent #14, saw change as “radical and perhaps even hostile to the organization’s structure and culture.”
- One risk was “opposition from [the company]’s project management and CIO organization . . . firm believers in the sanctity of the waterfall methodology.” (Respondent #10)
- Respondent #1 worried, “The leadership team in theory is there but in reality doesn’t really consider [change] a priority.”
• “It was clear that my agile SME role was just lip service and not seen as having value.” (Respondent #11)

The executives above the change agent can wield a tremendous amount of power. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) noted the danger of leadership using organizational politics to marginalize, demote, or remove the change agent, outcomes feared by many respondents:

• Respondent #2 feared being “sidelined by management.”
• Respondent #10 felt he was “not really given the power to drive the transition in a way that I feel could have made it more successful.”
• Respondent #12 “got rifled after a number of reorg[anization]s that put me lower in the organization. Part of this was, the company I was working for was also decreasing in size, and so I could be seen as an expensive overhead. Part of this was change in management that had no history.”
• Respondent #18 forecasted potential trouble, worrying that “my boss may get promoted or leave. Maybe new leadership won’t see value in changes, [and] I’m out the door.”
• Respondent #12 faced the stigma that a “‘coach’ is not typically producing anything ‘real’ and is often not in the direct management chain of the people that are seen to be producing.”
• “Internal corporate politics” are a big risk, according to Respondent #6.
• Respondent #11 saw similar risk “centered around an existing culture of fear and mistrust, and political wariness between [different] management.”
• Respondent #13 lamented, “You have to deal with ego, attitudes, and politics on an ongoing basis.”
With a gloomier (but no less realistic) outlook, Respondent #4 “figured I’d take a fall at some point.”

Resistance sometimes takes a more passive form, with management being reticent to act or simply losing the will to drive change:

- Respondent #12 knew that eventually “the appetite for change stops, and it is hard to get the next level of dramatic improvement going.”
- Likewise, Respondent #13 thought, “How far can I take them in their maturity will largely depend on their mind-set and their appetite for improvement.”

These responses indicated that while senior leadership talks the talk of change, many leaders cannot stomach making the necessary changes. Instead of actively supporting the change agent, they may revert or go into hiding, hoping they will not get caught in the fray of the change disruption. Jerome and Powell (2016) found that around half of all change agents said their managers provided inconsistent direction, spotty commitment, and typically said and did very different things.

In addition, these responses highlighted the power and political aspects of change leadership. Jerome and Powell (2016) estimated that two-thirds of change agents said politics interfered with their attempts to drive change. When change agents fail, they often blame it on politics, but when they succeed, they often attribute it to their stellar leadership ability. Change agents would do well to learn to break from the emotional aspects of driving change and understand how power and politics play a part in change. As change agents mature, they can learn that power and politics are the calculus of change and that their role requires that they master the situation, practice politics, and be constantly aware of their existence during times of change. Meyerson and Scully (1995) suggested that change agents are optimally positioned to be both critical of the status quo and a mitigating force against the perceived
extremism of RTC, and that savvy leaders can gain support from all stakeholders by playing to the middle.

*Company risks.* These responses highlight some thinking about the possibilities of introducing change and failing versus the repercussions for the company of not attempting change at all.

- Respondent #14 was heartened by a conversation with his supervisor: “My director was actually my greatest enabler. She asked me what I thought our risks were in using Scrum. ‘We fail’ was my response. She replied, ‘No, that’s not a risk. That’s an expectation! No, let’s think about this. I think our greatest risk is that Scrum actually works, and we deliver. Then we’ll have to deal with the fallout from that.’ I guess that’s why she was a director and I wasn’t. We didn’t deliver in 90 days—we delivered in 60. The result? The bank asked us to rewrite our entire mortgage system using Scrum. When we successfully did that, the lid came off, and I felt like I was standing naked in a parade.”

- Respondent #8 shared a similar outlook: “The risk of not introducing the change was much bigger than introducing the change. It was still risky because we had to implement the change properly to help the business move forward, and the outcome was anything but certain. But I knew that if I didn’t implement the change, the chance of failure was 100%.”

Some organizations have a “transactional imperative” to change because their current business methods or results are not sustainable (Francis et al., 2003). For these companies, standing pat is not an option. De Geus (2011) echoed this, stating that if organizations cannot keep up with changing demands, they are unlikely to survive in today’s rapidly changing business landscape. The two responses in this section highlight one case
where the change agent’s leadership revealed a paradox, and another where the change agent realized something and used it for self-motivation to drive the change.

**Resulting Impacts on the Change Agent**

This section represents the outcomes for the change agents as they experienced them in driving RTC. Some responses were about the experience of the change and how they felt they were treated both at home and at work. In addition, they were asked about their eventual fate in the organization and where they are today. Understanding this new dynamic can help guide change agents and their families, organizational development professionals, organizational leadership, human resources professionals, academic researchers in change leadership/management, and experts in change leadership theories and practices.

**Negative experiences.** The factors related to negative experiences that I identified were (a) lack of peer support, (b) ridicule and threats, (c) lack of management support, (d) process withered on the vine, (e) damaged career prospects, and (f) personal hardships.

*Lack of peer support.* Just as many change agents feared, they ended up lacking the support of their peers and colleagues:

- Respondent #15 introduced Scrum to his organization and reported that “there was a lot of resistance. . . . Peers were leery, employees were guardedly supportive.”

- Respondent #4 said that reception to the idea of change “was less than fair, generally. Most seemed to want the change to fail and didn’t make any attempt to understand why it was positive. Success was not immediate, so I understood the feelings, even if I thought it was unfair.”

- Respondent #3 was met with “resistance from peers due to anxiety, seniority, and also jealousy.”
• Respondent #9 observed, “Peers ranged from supportive through indifferent to obstructive. Same with the team that needed to be supported in the paradigm shift.”

Some resistance was political, and disguised as goodwill:

• Respondent #16 said, “The people that wanted to see the change happen were supportive, however, cautious in showing their support. . . . Most of the peers turned away from me, either scared to be associated or just viewing it as a threat.”

There were “little glimmers of hope,” but the “success of small experiments caused a lot of animosity.”

In many cases, initial skepticism became actual attrition, with resistors eventually leaving the company rather than see the change through:

• Respondent #8 said, “The people who were most enamored with the old way of doing things self-selected out and left the company.”

• Respondent #2 wrote, “The good folks left at a rate of one per month within the first 5 months of the change in leadership. The departures were middle management. Then team leads and individual contributors began to leave at the cadence of one per week.”

A sense of loneliness, abandonment, and betrayal permeated these responses. The change agents reported being left to fend for themselves and cope with all the stress associated with driving RTC alone while the rest of the organization worked against them. This echoed findings by Meyerson and Scully (1995), who noted that change agents take on heavy emotional burdens stemming from their work and often end up with no allies in the office. In some of the respondents’ cases, colleagues did not like the new ways of working and left the company. The change agent and the change itself can seem like ominous threats
to people, who may fear losing something (Gilley et al., 2009). That creates a difficult
dynamic because not changing can be the quickest way to lose one’s job.

*Ridicule and threats.* Of all the challenges the change agent faces, none seems worse
than the disrespect and corporate bullying that take place when change is attempted.

Sometimes this takes the form of outright disrespect:

- Regarding supervisors, Respondent #11 said, “Not one exhibits an agile mind-set,
  and so I never felt respect for what I was trying to do. I felt they indulged only to
  the extent that they thought it would reflect well on their personal agenda.”
- Respondent #14 thought “my change effort behaviors were largely viewed by
  critics and even some supporters not as wholly beneficial and positive but rather
  as somewhat unintelligent, uncalculating, or unaware.”
- Respondent #10 was “openly perceived as a troublemaker and a bit of a crazy
  person.”

The social climate lends itself to mockery of the change agent, often behind his or her
back:

- Respondent #14 said, “Other employees admired my efforts, and some mocked
  me for trying to change the unchangeable. . . . Management criticized me and
  ridiculed me for everything from being idealistic and contrarian to being a threat
  and dangerous. I have a whole book full of stories about that.”
- Respondent #16 recalled, “People mocked me, and I could tell they laughed and
  talked about me around my back. Even my boss would participate in that and at
  times would try to discourage me. At the end however, through persistence I was
  one of the two leaders that not only introduced change in an organization, but at
  the same time people that once mocked me and talked about me supported me.”
Ultimately, Respondent #10 “was ridiculed for my decision to choose a fixed price contract type. Most of the ridicule happened behind my back, but some of it occurred in my presence. . . . These concepts, although certainly not that esoteric, were made fun of as being unimaginably complex and impossible to work with. My management supported me at first, but under pressure from others, their support eventually eroded.”

Some pushback moved beyond verbal ridicule and into the realm of actual threats against their livelihood:

- Respondent #14 said, “Peers’ treatment ranged from supportive to threatening.” They were told, “You better knock it off, you are advocating for the elimination of our jobs. . . . One project manager stopped me in a hallway and essentially threatened me, saying, ‘There are 270 of us PMs here and 269 of us don’t like this Scrum crap. You are advocating for our elimination and you’re one of us. You better knock it off.’” Another “called me ‘Jesus,’ asserting that I would ultimately end up on a cross.”

Change agents are verbally attacked, mentally abused, threatened, and marginalized, with every attempt made from multiple angles to eliminate the change agent and the change that came with them (Heifetz & Linsky, 2017). Even if their intentions are good and their guidance bears fruit, that guidance may threaten someone’s or the organization’s norms, and so resistors turn on the change agents out of self-preservation (Foucault, 1983; Zweibelson, 2012). It’s surreal to think that intelligent, highly educated people can act this way, but it highlights some vicious core survival instincts that people can exhibit even in the most civil environments. Adults want to deal with the topic of bullying when it involves their children,
yet those same people can go to work and bully a coworker who may be taking a major risk to try and improve something and make the work environment better.

*Lack of management support.* This group of responses focused on how respondents were treated by their management/leadership. As expected, change agents faced different forms of resistance. Some lacked full-throated management support:

- Respondent #2 thought that successes “were later viewed by management as threats. ‘Self-managing teams? Then what do we need managers for?’ seemed to be their thought pattern. . . . Certain management folks ‘had my back’ the best they could. However, soon my alliance-based management folks had to look out for their own hides, due to the changing of the guard. As I continued to work my existing alliances, I was then marginalized by management.”

- It was clear to Respondent #12 that “exec[utive] management didn’t think what we were doing was useful (despite the metrics, etc.). There was also a lack of appetite to do more change.”

Although they may have had some outward support, some change agents were undercut more subtly through processes or politics:

- Respondent #19 found that “management was skeptical and largely unsupportive. They said things like, ‘I want to believe that what you are saying will work, but I just don’t see your vision.’”

- Respondent #11 said, “Management had no interest and no appreciation for the value of what I did. . . . More often than not I feel management is patronizing and condescending toward me.”

- As the process went on, Respondent #10 “felt I was being left out of key decisions and could no longer really exert positive influence.”
• Respondent #16 said, “Even my boss would participate in [mocking] and at times would try to discourage me.”

• “As soon as I started making changes . . . they cut my budget.” (Respondent #18)

Some respondents got “initiative fatigue,” with the system driving the change agent down until the changes became less valuable (Buchanan et al., 1999; Doyle, 2001):

• Respondent #6 wrote, “Eventually the executive focus shifted and the ‘naysayers’ came back full force.”

• Respondent #15 had the experience that “senior leaders pull back on the reins, then cut you loose.”

• Respondent #14 saw the long-term abandonment of the change initiative: “The spread of Scrum through the company went fast but was too diluted, operating from a point of compliance with a directive from management instead of people finding the ‘right’ way to do things. In 2011, everything came to an end. A new exec[utive] VP came in and decided to shut down the ‘crusade.’ The words Scrum and agile were forbidden from being spoken.” The respondent then decided to just hang on until he could retire in 2013, using the practices in silence with his project teams. The organization had gone full circle, it all seemed like a “charade,” and the respondent felt completely used and unappreciated.

• Discussing the social dynamic around succeeding in change efforts, Respondent #18 said, “When we start succeeding, it’s not time to celebrate. We threaten the status quo and the organization pulls us down. Eventually, the company doesn’t value change anymore.”
• Respondent #11 said he was “gone before they were gone, and even now consensus is that agile is dead at [his organization]. . . . Some were heard to say that it was a done deal when they eliminated my role.”

• Respondent #2 reflected, “When the alliance was squashed and disarmed, most of us then decide it was time to find the exit.”

Tushman et al. (1986) wrote that RTC requires close executive involvement in all phases. But in these responses, there is an incredible amount of resistance and a strong force to do whatever is necessary to shut down the change agent, even though some were brought in or given an assignment or promotion to drive the changes that would help the business. Once the changes began, few in leadership had the resolve to stick with it and support the change agent, instead doing a quick turnabout and showing the rest of the organization that they were back in line with the majority. Huy et al. (2014) noted that when changes do not deliver as expected, senior leaders who supported the change may leave or be removed, delegitimizing the change agent and expediting their own departure. At that point, a new regime enters and shuts the whole thing down, ordering everyone to revert to business as usual.

These responses, along with the previous two sections, are some of the most disturbing aspects of organizational change, but they are very real. The texts and luminaries of organizational change and leadership never seem to capture these true dynamics about the lived experiences of change agents.

*Process withered on the vine.* Keeping a radical change moving forward is often harder than initiating the change in the first place, and many respondents found themselves at the helm of a change that may have showed some initial promise but ultimately died a slow death:
• Respondent #13 realized, “Innovation was stagnant and there was an extreme lack of product incubation. There was a subculture of defeat that affected the overall maturity, no matter how focused we were. The writing was on the wall as they say.”

• Respondent #12 recognized that too often “the appetite for change stops and it is hard to get the next level of dramatic improvement going... After a while you’d see certain symptoms of ‘not being seen as valuable’ or ‘we are already doing this.’ For example, each successive reorg puts you further down in the management hierarchy like there is an assumption that ‘we’ve done everything we can here.’ My feeling is that this means companies really have not captured the real essence of agile—there is always more that can be improved—that the feeling is that agile is more a destination. But that is more a feeling.”

• “Customers aren’t ready for continuous deployment and true collaboration, which stifles the opportunity for maturity.” (Respondent #13)

• Respondent #15 began doubting himself as the organization turned on him: “It was very frustrating.”

Small wins can build momentum for implementing change (Kouzes & Posner, 1987, 2002), but according to Pascale (1999), organizations lose momentum over time if they are not being pushed forward. Unfortunately, these respondents experienced the latter scenario. Once things got moving and there were benefits demonstrated, most leaders wanted to take their foot off the accelerator, claim victory, and get back to business as usual. The change agent sees the initial benefit as a significant yet small step forward in a long journey. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) described “seducing” the change agent to cease driving change by praising them for how much improvement has been made, even though there is still much to
do. True RTC requires determination and perseverance over the long term to search for and initiate continuous change. Bennis (1983) stated that if change agents lose their self-determination out of exhaustion or stagnation, they will most likely fail in their mission. In other words, once the novelty wears off and the appetite for change diminishes, the change agent is finished. In some cases, organizations can improve too fast and exceed the demand for their products or services from customers, which can also be a key factor in the diminishing support and appetite for change.

_Damaged career prospects._ Driving RTC can grind down change agents in a variety of ways, starting with traditional burnout and social pressures that make their impacts felt beyond any one job:

- Respondent #18’s boss forced him into situations where he was working 14-hour days, 7 days a week—and then terminated him.
- Respondent #15 said, “I have to realize that I’m . . . not the most popular person there.” This respondent is out of a job again, looking for his next mission.

Long-term career impacts are a real danger for change agents, with many falling into patterns of behavior that force them to leave their change agent role and damage their ongoing job prospects:

- Respondent #14 “would like to think I advocated the change out of benevolence or altruism, but I’m not sure that might be believed. However, I risked a lot and effectively shut down my career advancement as a result. Whether that is out of benevolence, stupidity or some other characteristic can be debated ad nauseum.”
- Respondent #17 realized that he seemed to be “in a pattern of being at companies for 3–4 years. I try to make an improvement, it eventually gets out of control, the
change effort ends, and I’m out the door. Beginning to think this is how my career will go.”

- Respondent #9 said, “We succeeded, improved our speed by about 30% while getting better results. My personal fate? I left the company.”

The responses in this section indicated that these people were getting more and more comfortable with frequent changes, although it put additional stress on family life. None of them went into a new role with the full realization that their tenure would be short, but they appeared to have had a back channel thought process to ensure that if something did happen, they would not experience the shock they may have in their first few experiences. Doyle (2002) argued that if change agents are not adequately trained and prepared for the challenges they are going to face, the stress they experience affects not just their job performance but also their emotional well-being. Therefore, it is a great benefit to the organization if change agents are prepared and feel like they have nothing to lose, which in turn allows them to move forward without the extreme fear of what might happen to them. This dynamic again highlights a key area for companies to look at when evaluating how they might support change leadership.

As of the writing of this dissertation, all of the respondents have had career impacts as a result of driving major changes in their organization. A few have had more than one job change. The good news is that they have all found better opportunities, and in some cases other organizations have hired them to help drive change.

Personal hardships. These responses highlighted the personal hardships that can emerge for change agents and their families—tensions that spill over from the office to home, from coworkers to family:
• Respondent #15 “felt like a caged animal. [Implementing change] was very frustrating,” so he began doubting himself as the organization turned on him. He felt “exhausted and it always seemed like there was just the next hill in front of [him].” This same respondent’s all-in approach began to affect his family life. He said his wife often told him he was “overdoing it” by taking his job too personally.

• Similarly, Respondent #18 admitted, “My wife said it’s hard to see me frustrated. I can’t leave it at work. She has to live with it too. She’s said to me before, ‘I support your decision to leave.’ Sometimes my wife sees the frustration before I’m even aware of it.”

• Respondent #14 also considered family obligations: “My wife was supportive but cautious. We had three young daughters, and losing my job would have dire effects in her mind.”

• Respondent #19 said, “My family was unaware” of hardships at work. “I kept most of it from them and I frankly didn’t want to worry my pregnant wife. I realize this probably isn’t the wisest course of action.”

• Respondent #17’s wife would say that this was a pattern and suggested that maybe “you are the one with the issue.” This put a lot of pressure on the family in addition to what was happening at work.

These quotes force us to consider how much organizational change affects people outside the confines of the office. How many organizational development activities have focused on the change agent’s family? Radical changes have a much bigger footprint than we realize, and these responses remind us about how personal change can be. Doyle (2001) described change agents going through feelings of stress, overload, depression, and not being
able to focus. Dealing with these emotional responses is not something to teach in a classroom or assess with a multiple-choice instrument. No change leadership guru can examine the unique family relationships of every potential change agent and prescribe an n-step model to move the change forward (Collins, 1998).

**Positive experiences.** Although the process is challenging, not all of a change agent’s experiences are negative. If nothing else, some respondents’ positive experiences may have been the glimmer of hope that kept them seeking another opportunity to repeat the process. RTC helped drive satisfying organizational improvements and proved intensely rewarding professionally and personally:

- Respondent #7 thought that “management, peers and employees put a lot of trust in me and in the pilot implementations we were embarking upon. In the end they were very successful, and agile was fully implemented at [company]. There was definitely a lot of expectations and pressure, but that is understandable since we were changing the entire way we did our product development.”

- Respondent #8 said, “Management was very supportive as long as I delivered the new software product. . . . They were very hands-off, but if I needed anything, they usually provided it. They also provided me with the opportunity to expand the team and hire new people which helped in bringing about change. . . . My peers were very supportive and actively worked with me to bring about the change. They vouched for me with their groups which gave me a good deal of credibility, which I still had to back up with actions, but it was a good start.”

- Respondent #4 wrote, “Since I personally knew it was ultimately going to be good for the division and the company, I was determined to move forward and continue to improve.”
• Respondent #6 “kept working as much as I could because what I was doing had value and I knew I was the only one that could drive it. Knowing of the difficulties I had, motivated a lot of folks to keep going. They saw how I used difficulty to drive change.”

Attrition is not always a bad thing. In some cases, it is necessary. Supporting RTC helped some organizations effectively streamline and move in a new direction:

• Respondent #8 was pleased that “the people who were most enamored with the old way of doing things self-selected out and left the company.”

Many change agents also expressed gratitude for support they received from peers, friends, and family during the change effort:

• Respondent #9 said, “Direct management backed me. . . . Family and friends were always supportive.”

• Respondent #8 was “heartened by the support and encouragement I got from my peers who confirmed the need for drastic change.”

• Respondent #16 wrote, “Family and friends are always supportive, need good people that can calibrate your bad and low days.”

Of course, sometimes support comes from using humor to put the change effort into its proper context:

• “I’m amused that most family and friends still have no idea what I do.”

(Respondent #11)

The positive aspects of change fuel change agents to keep going. When things are working, leaders instill confidence in their followers, and the naysayers eventually come around (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). When the organization is improving, and everyone is inspired, it drives the change agents to keep pushing (Bass, 1985). But, as noted above, once
the novelty wears off, the resistance may return, and in many cases, the change will be diminished or silenced by the masses. However, these change agents have indicated that the positive aspects of change outweigh the negative for them, and that’s what motivates them to continue their mission.

**Career impacts.** The information in Table 6 was part of the survey/interview process, in which participants were asked to identify the role they had when they initiated RTC, what happened as a result, and where they are in their career now. Note that this table is not mapped to specific questions or for each participant; rather, it encompasses the full range of answers given to each category, some of which overlapped for different respondents. Also, this is not a map of what happened to each participant. Some of the results in the second and third columns apply to multiple participants. It simply shows the types of outcomes for this collection of participants.

As Table 6 illustrates, the fates of these change agents are evident: They all had senior-level positions and in some way were forced to find another job. This raises issues about whether organizations put leaders in a position to succeed. Imagine beginning a change leadership session with “Welcome to Leadership Training 101. You’re all fired! Now, we can begin.” This is akin to Ackoff’s (1974) approach in beginning an idealized design process.

**Common Themes Discovered**

Common themes and experiences emerged when examining the experiences of these people. They all share a similar story, yet all think they are unique. The following major themes were exhibited:

**The decision was very personal and involved family.** The survey contained a question related to the involvement of family in the participant’s decision to drive a major
Table 6: Career Impacts on Change Agents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change agent role</th>
<th>Change result</th>
<th>Current change agent career</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Project manager</td>
<td>Quit (disgusted)</td>
<td>External coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agile development coach</td>
<td>Fired</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>System testing manager</td>
<td>Laid off</td>
<td>Trainer/coach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scrum master</td>
<td>Job eliminated</td>
<td>Retired/new career</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change champion</td>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Another position to do it again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sr. manager software engineer</td>
<td>Quit (opportunity)</td>
<td>Another company to do it again</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Director</td>
<td>Still there</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP, development</td>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VP, product development</td>
<td>Forced out</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enterprise agile coach</td>
<td>Set up to fail</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head of PMO</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change agent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agile program manager</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

change. This was important to determine if their decision was more professional or more personal, which would certainly have some impact on how the results could be used to develop future change leaders. The effect of the current state, the change, and results in some direct or indirect way affected the participants’ families. In the current state, families were affected by the participants’ frustrations of dealing with the way things were, including overtime, weekend work, negative results, blame, and embarrassment. The change agents brought these problems home with them (when they made it home). Some people experienced problems at home and, in a few cases, suffered physical illness from the stress and exhaustion.

Reaching their limit and recognizing a need to change—and that they might be the change agent—brought on another level of stress in the family, as they had to face the known
professional and financial risks of being the outlier, troublemaker, squeaky wheel, or rebel. For the most part, their spouses/significant others wished someone else had led the change but ultimately provided reserved support for their partner. More stress came as the change was initiated, the change agent dealt with the wavering support and resistance at work and began to feel the backlash of doing so. Risking the stability of a good job, salary, benefits, friends, and professional reputation has a tremendous impact on family relationships. Some of the participants felt like they were driven from past experiences growing up where they were forced to stand up for themselves, or they may have had to deal with much tougher situations such as having abusive parents or a broken family. This makes the change agent susceptible to psychological issues that could reach the point of needing coaching, counseling, or additional treatment, taking change agency far outside the boundaries of the organization’s typical domain of expertise concerning employees.

They were motivated or inspired from a past experience. Some participants experienced a sense of motivation or inspiration from other people or past experiences. In a few cases, they were challenged by a thought leader in the industry, either directly or indirectly, to make a change. One participant even recounted the industry leader saying, “You’re either incredibly smart or incredibly stupid for attempting this.” (Author’s note: The same industry leader told me the same thing when I made my decision years before.) Some were motivated by a training class they attended, where they usually learned about new processes that they thought would never apply to their work. Some saw the opportunity to drive a major change as a way to practice a new approach or technique they learned through training. One of the participants recounted being influenced by a guest speaker at an MBA program, which at the time did not mean much but became instantly meaningful as soon as the participant was assigned to lead a major change effort.
Participants made numerous comments about childhood experiences, both positive and negative, that guided these people in their agency. Stories of broken families, abusive parents, having to take high levels of responsibility at a young age, and being responsible for raising siblings; lessons imparted from parents; and a strong sense of faith and service to others all played important roles. Past influences play an important part of someone’s disposition to initiate and handle RTC, which will most often fall outside the organization’s boundaries with respect to developing leaders.

**They were driven by a strong vision for the future.** These people all seemed to have a strong vision for a much better future. They had experiences with negative consequences and had felt the pain themselves. They considered themselves rebellious, at least enough to try something new at a known risk. They wanted to create a better outcome for customers, colleagues, and themselves. They all shared a passion for the change they wanted to make, and once they made the decision, they went all in. There was a strong sense of wanting to move people to a better, happier work environment where they would be more fulfilled.

**They were at the end of their rope.** The participants were generally experienced in their careers and have been involved in organizational practices both as participants and leaders. They have all tried to make minor changes as their careers progressed in an attempt to make things better. They were knowledgeable about industry trends and similar results in other companies. They had reached a point where they felt there was no other viable option that did not involve a new level of risk (which would also require its own new level of courage). They became “exasperated and disenchanted” with the current way of doing things. Starting the change process seemed to set in motion a feeling of “no turning back”—a “one-way street,” perhaps as a coping mechanism to make sure they did not revert to the previous situation. They took the current conditions and created the “burning platform” for
themselves, so that they could serve the needs of others whom they would have to lead through the change. The conditions they were dealing with often involved project failures, angry customers, failing business units, persistent and prolonged product quality problems, toxic work environments, massive amounts of unpaid overtime, widespread stress, and negative career reputations, among others. The participants either became fed up themselves or were brought in as change agents because management had felt there was nothing left to do but make a major, radical change.

_They took known risks to their career and finances._ There is no doubt that the participants were aware of some risk going into an RTC. The degree to which they thought the risk would affect them varied from a slight setback in their career to a full-out career implosion that could destroy their family life. This is asking quite a bit from people who would not receive a large payout from the board of directors after termination as many senior-level executives would. Proceeding with change despite the high risks speaks to the level of intense passion and vision for the future that these respondents needed to navigate the journey and come out alive, and they have certainly done just that. In most cases, they have entered a much better situation than they were before. That being said, few had considered any benefit to themselves if they succeeded. As Quinn (2000: 183) stated, the risk of change is dangerous, and failure is a high probability: “Leadership means go forth to die.” Transformational people know that unless they have something worth dying for, they have nothing worth living for.

This can certainly apply to an organizational or career context to help explain what people might be dealing with psychologically before, during, and after an RTC process. As discussed above, this transformational process can have a significant impact on family affairs as well. Financial impacts, such as losing a job or relocating to another city, can be
devastating to a family not prepared for such an event. In some cases, participants said that these impacts were discussed openly in their family, whereas others chose to be prepared but not dwell on the dangers.

**They faced strong opposition on all fronts.** This category focused on reactions to the change agent driving a radical change in the organization. The participants’ responses certainly reinforced Newton’s third law that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. In this case, the opposite reaction could far exceed the original action. The opposition sometimes came from within the change agents and in the form of self-doubt, a lack of confidence, and gripping fear that paralyzed them from acting. Some of this internal opposition led to exhaustion and sickness.

Even if there is support from family initially, the family can turn into another source of opposition. One participant’s wife said he was “overdoing it and taking the job too seriously.” Another’s wife suggested that maybe her husband was, in fact, “the one with the problem.” It is important to note again how much this affects family members of the change agent. Every participant had faced opposition on multiple fronts and at different levels of intensity, from mild resistance to outright verbal attacks and threats. The resistance was both covert and overt. One participant was called “Jesus” and told he would wind up on the cross. Another participant said he felt like a “caged animal.”

Peers could be mildly supportive but were also very cautious and ready to run away as soon as management turned on the change agent. Surprisingly, some small successes intensified the resistance, as it signaled that the change might just work and now everyone had to deal with it. In a number of responses, participants reported that initial success increased the level of management resistance and decreased their support for the change.
This often led to more severe action, such as marginalization, job elimination, funding reduction, ridicule, impossible work conditions, termination, and damaged reputation.

*They were initially supported but then abandoned by management.* One of the more interesting dynamics that occurred for participants was getting initial support from their leadership only to have it pulled from them later in the change process. Some participants were hired or assigned specifically to drive RTC. This suggested a “hired gun” approach to driving change, so leaders did not have to face the daunting and risky challenge themselves. The participants may have also been seduced into believing that they had to save the day from less-than-competent managers who did not seem to have to guts to do it for themselves.

If participants had the support of management, they felt empowered and supported and could drive change even with the heaviest resistance, or so they figured. In reality, they noticed support slipping away and people distancing themselves because the change agent went “too far.” Their supporters were faced with either joining the revolution or getting back in line with everyone else, where it appeared to be much safer. These types of changes are rough and require courage. Leadership support is critical to changes but so often lacking. Leaders usually have more to lose; the next senior position is not just waiting for them nearby. This places an additional burden on organizations trying to develop change leadership as it becomes much more personal.

*They had some success but ultimately left.* If the change agent can persevere and muster enough support to get a quick win, there is a small chance that the change begins to take hold. As the participants’ responses showed, there is a heavy price to pay for this, but they all agreed that it was worth the sacrifices. It is, however, a short-lived experience because the small step forward was only the first in a long journey and the organization did not want to go on the full ride. The old guard often accepted some change, though it often fell
far short of the vision the change agent had. This caused additional frustration among change agents and more resistance from colleagues, peers, and management. Some participants became accustomed to the fact that each job they had would likely last only 3–4 years before they decided to move on or were forced to do so. A number of participants made a career change to process improvement coaching and training, allowing them to go into companies as an outsider and instill change ideas in others in hopes that they would be motivated to change. The following section summarizes the results and conclusions for each of the research questions for this study.

**Research Question 1: What Factors Trigger a “Go” Moment in Leaders Initiating a Radical Change in an Organization?**

The first research question referred to the factors and antecedents that led participants to move from a potential change agent to an RTC agent. The literature covers some of the traits of change leaders but does not address the personal choice process that could only be captured by the lived experiences of people that have actually been through it. RTC is complex and nonlinear, and the decisions that put someone in the position to become an RTC agent are also complex and nonlinear, as are the contexts in which these people find themselves. Often, the only way to save the organization is RTC. As such, it has become the new norm for organizations.

Plowman, Baker, Beck, Kulkarni, Solansky, and Travis (2007) examined complexity science and its relationship to radical change. They suggested that because future desired states are mostly unknown in complex situations, as they emerge from the ongoing interactions and self-organization of agents within a system, the role of leadership is paramount. The surveys indicated some concentration in the areas of context, leadership style, past experiences, and personal motivators.
Context. The unique circumstances in which a person finds himself or herself is one factor that may trigger him or her to act when RTC is needed. Kotter (2014) stated that organizations stall because of the limited number of experienced change leaders, siloed incremental improvement thinking, overly restrictive rules and procedures, pressure to meet short-term numbers, insufficient buy-in, and a general sense of complacency. Roberts and Bradley (1988) described change leaders as being in the context where the environment is in crisis, causing much stress and turbulence. This is much in alignment with Snowden and Boone’s (2007) assertion that leaders have to tailor their approach depending on the complexity of the situation. When the context has values and requirements of adaptation that diverge from the norm such that “truly creative action by the leader is required,” a rebel emerges (Downton, 1973). This is what Burns (1978) described as “revolutionary leadership.”

Survey respondents identified some contextual factors that prompted them to step forward to lead RTC. There were situations where they were hired or assigned to do the job as an insider-outsider, a “hired gun,” or what Meyerson and Scully (1995) called “outsiders within.” This would indicate that the management team that hired them may have inadvertently been trying to use a response for a complicated context—a known good practice but one that requires outside expertise (Snowden & Boone, 2007). In reality, a complex situation may have existed, for which there was no known solution; therefore, a solution had to emerge through experiments/iterations. This is a good illustration of the Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007).

Management’s lack of patience in letting learning take place can also transfer to the change agent, who also does not have a magic solution. In other cases, the respondents recognized that the organization had reached a critical point where they felt a need to step
forward. Respondent #14 said, “I was exasperated and disenchanted with the traditional approaches we used towards projects and product development.” Respondent #4 said, “As I tried to survive and manage the change of values due to a new leadership regime, I built a rebel alliance.” Respondents #13 and #14 identified that they were in situations where they were given “permission” to change things and wanted to tackle a big challenge. This was supported by Weick and Quinn (1999), who suggested that change agents are attracted to solving unsolvable problems and taking advantage of the recognition that sticking to the status quo will not put an organization in a position to succeed.

Another contextual category found in survey responses can be summarized in two words: “Why not?” Some respondents reported that they “just went for it” with a “nothing-to-lose” approach. Although some of these respondents initially appeared reckless, the interviews unveiled that they were more thoughtful in their actions than first impressions suggested. They were willing to sacrifice themselves to move everyone else to a better place. Chapman (2002) and O’Hara-Devereaux (2004) both agreed that conditions that are ripe for a change agent and the ensuing moments of activation cannot be planned. The change agents themselves determine if there is something worth taking the risk for.

The circumstances in which an organization finds itself can trigger a potential change agent. In today’s business environment, the customer plays the most important role in product development and services. When customers become angry or disenchanted, conditions become intolerable. Since the turn of the 21st century, software has shifted from novelty to a commodity (Cusumano, 2008), where expectations for quality and speed increase exponentially. This puts tremendous pressure on an organization’s processes and people, raising the bar to a point where most organizations struggle to achieve using old practices and organizational strategies.
Respondent #15 spoke about working late nights on phone calls with angry customers, working tremendous overtime and working weekends, which together created a “moment of epiphany.” Several respondents described moments of realization that the current practices, approaches, and organization were not suitable to meeting customer expectations. Kotter (2014) and Friedman (2016) declared that organizations must find ways to engage customers, continually learn, and improve to meet the demand for speed, quality, and function in products and services. Companies that do not adapt face almost-certain self-destruction (Amis et al., 2004). Respondent #8 said, “The risk of not changing how we do things was much greater and more menacing than the risk of failing at the change.”

**Leadership style.** The literature on leadership styles has been abundant for many decades (Northouse, 2016). Leaders of RTC can draw on several different styles and move between them depending on the necessary context. The most prevalent styles observed were transformational, charismatic, and adaptive leadership. Quinn (2000) examined the difference between a transformational leader and a transformational change agent. He stated we become transformational change agents through our own choices (Quinn, 2000: 25). Heifetz et al. (2009) referred to a multifaceted leadership style for use in a constant state of crisis. These leaders are improvisational and experimental, their approach more art than science. It is not a linear process, and it cannot be taught in a classroom—though one of the common threads in the interviews was a focus on learning. The participants were continuous learners who soaked up both classic leadership patterns and evolving information like a sponge.

This was a common theme echoed by Senge (1997) as he described the learning style of organizational and leadership development. Garcia (1996) described RTC agents as people with a passion for making things better. She stated that they have an intellectual agility in
adapting the myriad theories and practices, the intestinal fortitude to endure the resistance they will face, and a healthy sense of humor to maintain their sanity.

In the interviews, none of the participants mentioned a leadership style, Myers-Briggs personality type, or organizational change model, even though they are all well aware of them. They relied on common sense and their intuition, which may have been shaped in part by their previous learnings. They were asked about things in their youth that may have shaped them and how those experiences could have played a part in their decision to act. All the respondents tried to pin their approach and style to something in their past. A couple of them recalled difficult family situations they faced at a young age. They drew on very deep personal pain that both triggered them and put the risks in the perspective of a much more difficult situation they had already faced. This allowed them to minimize the risks, at least in their own minds. Respondent #9 stated that this is “just the way I am.” Respondent #17 described “a mind-set to continually improve and push the envelope.”

Another factor that came out in three interviews (Respondents #7, #15, and #17) was fear, specifically a fear of failure. Fear can be a great motivator or a great inhibitor to action. Jeffers (2007) expressed that pushing through fear is less frightening than living with the underlying fear that comes from feeling helpless. Wise (2009) examined the science behind fear in extreme situations to identify how the brain deals with feelings of fear and how people make decisions in those contexts. He discussed the role that expertise plays in the ability to take a complex problem (situation) and break it into chunks in order to cope with and tackle the problem in smaller pieces. This gives insight into how change agents deal with RTC and how others experiencing the change may not be able to, leading to increased opposition.

**Personal motivation.** The survey respondents ultimately had to choose for themselves to become an agent of RTC. Putting someone with the “right” leadership style in a context
that may be ripe for change does not ensure that the change agent will activate. Rather, something personal motivates the potential change agent to act. Foucault (1983) stated the change agent must have the courage to speak the truth and be different from the majority. He identified a sense of duty the change agent must feel. March (1994) spoke about a cognitive pattern match that people go through in their decisions called the logic of appropriateness framework. He stated that decisions are shaped by situational recognition, identity, and the application of a set of rules. He stated the question in mind is, “What would a person like me do in a situation like this?” where me refers to one’s identity, do refers to the rules people draw on, and this is recognition of the situation (March, 1994).

Meyerson and Scully (1995) described the “tempered radical” as someone who identifies with and is committed to organizations as well as a cause, community, or ideology that is fundamentally different from, and possibly at odds with, the dominant culture. Radicalism stimulates them to challenge the status quo. Meyerson and Scully (1995) stated that change agents are toughened by challenges related to what they see as injustice or ineffectiveness. Quinn (2000: 19) identified the conceptual framework of principled behavior, saying about change agents, “We must stand outside the norm. To do that we need to go inside ourselves and ask who we are, what we stand for, and what impact we really want to have. Within ourselves we find principle, purpose, and courage. . . . We change the world by changing ourselves” (Quinn, 2000: 19).

One of the motivators respondents keyed into was training or mentorship. Training may not have taught them how to drive a change or what leadership model to apply, but it built up their toolbox and ignited some new ideas that connected them to the context and gave them a path forward. Respondent #13 was triggered and found his purpose through the training he received from me and another instructor. Another was influenced by a guest
speaker at a master’s degree program. Respondent #14 was both challenged and warned by a mentor—as I have been—who challenged the respondent to drive change in the organization.

While training and mentoring are not typically the main motivators that activate change agents, organizations spend a lot of time and money developing and running training programs, thinking this is the best method to prepare change leaders. This study indicated that preparing change leaders is much more personal and not something that a standardized training program can address. The greatest motivators for these respondents seemed to come from within. They had a desire to do something bigger than themselves for the benefit of others.

Some (Respondents #4, #8, #17, #18, and #19) showed an inclination to drive change for the greater good of the organization and the opportunity to create a better context for people to work in. Respondent #8 said, “I wanted to create an environment where people could grow, and I enjoyed participating in growing the business.” Respondent #18 said, “I feel like I need to help people become more than what they are.” Respondent #11 referred to compassion for people as the driver for pushing change in the organization. The respondent had a sense of humility and a selfless approach in the conviction that there was no choice other than to act.

The survey respondents expressed a strong mission-oriented feeling, which came out as a sense of personal responsibility to drive change. Respondent #16 stated, “I can’t feel good about work knowing there’s a better way.” Respondent #18 felt like it was the leader’s responsibility to create an environment of change. Respondents also expressed this in deeper terms, including a “sense of faith” (Respondent #16), a belief in the process as if it were a new religion (Respondent #1), or a belief in what is possible (Respondent #11).
Once a decision is made or change is ignited, a change agent must move forward with passion, enthusiasm, and energy. This not only helps change agents survive but also helps them stave off the tremendous opposing force that will try and knock them down. The interviews showed a strong sense of excitement and enthusiasm, with comments such as “I was determined to do the right thing” (Respondent #14) and “I was feeling elation. . . . We were going to change the world!” (Respondent #15). Finding a better way and working to improve the organization’s capability gave these people a great feeling of making a difference—of stepping up instead of settling for the status quo. Having a strong vision drove these change agents to act and work for the betterment of others and the collective organization.

Work experiences. Change agents are often influenced by past work experiences, both positive and negative. Again, this points to the respondents’ penchant for learning. Past successes as an agent of RTC fuel confidence that is critical for a change leader. Respondents #6, #11, #14, and #18 identified some past successes either in their current or previous organization. This confidence was exhibited in Respondent #18’s comment that “I try to be confident, let go of fear. I can always get another job.” Knowing they can handle whatever the biggest personal loss might be allows change agents to take a nothing-to-lose approach, which in turn empowers them to question the status quo. Change agents are also shaped and influenced by past negative work experiences, including a project or change initiative failure. Blanchard (2009) explained how change agents can use negative experience and fierce resistance to strengthen their resolve and continue to press forward.

Conclusions. As demonstrated by the survey respondents and literature reviewed, there is no single set of easily identifiable answers to what triggers a change agent to lead RTC. The key factors were (a) individual personalities, (b) the context in which the potential
agents found themselves, (c) their knowledge and practice of leadership styles, and (d) their past work and life experiences. It is not a one-size-fits-all process that can be managed with a checklist, nor can it be covered in a training curriculum. It is truly a complex, nonlinear process in which these four areas influence the change agent in combinations that change as conditions emerge. Not only does something have to trigger these change agents, but also the agents must influence others around them who have their own inherent reaction patterns.

Rolls (1995) stated that corporations need leaders who have been through their own transformation to help facilitate the transformation of others. An inability to identify specific trigger points presents an enormous problem for industries that must go through RTC. Organizations and academic institutions must continue to prepare people by attempting to influence these four areas and create the conditions for triggers to fire and for leadership to emerge at just the right time. It became clear from the survey and interview results that once a change agent drives RTC, transforming themselves and others, they continue to seek opportunities to do it again and seek out others who have done the same as a support system. Quinn (2000) supported this in his book Change the World, stating that while transformational people are unique, those who experience the transformational process are connected by shared values and shared experiences. They are connected through transformational power.

**Research Question 2: What Risks Do Change Agents Perceive to Themselves in Leading Radical Organizational Change?**

The goal of the survey and interview questions related to the second research question was to understand the change agents’ perception of risks. Did they understand the risks when they were called to action? Were they mindful of warnings from colleagues and bosses? How
did those feelings affect their approach? How did they mitigate, rationalize, or otherwise deal with these risks? What does the literature say about these risks?

**Warnings from the literature.** The literature is full of warnings, though they are heavily interwoven with prescriptive how-to and why-to content. In general, authors try to wrap up complexities in a nice theory, model, or n-step table, hoping to create a recipe that masks the underlying warnings for the change agent. Quinn (2000) spelled out a rare view of change leadership:

> Leadership is not about results. It is about commitment. The entire management literature fails to understand this. Leadership authors do not understand that leadership means “Go forth and die.” If they did understand it, they would not be enticed to write about it—because people do not want to hear this message. (Quinn, 2000: 179)

Cramm (2009) added that nobody ever tells change agents that in order to thrive, they have to be willing to die. Zweibelson (2012) also discussed how the organization tries to kill the change agent. The words “die” and “kill” are used surprisingly often to describe what change agents might face. History has not provided much reason for hope. Quinn (2000) cited Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr. as inspirational models of change agents. Zweibelson (2012) spoke about how the organization may lash out and silence or destroy the “problematizer” (ref. Foucault, 1983) as an act of self-preservation.

Tushman et al. (1986) called these types of radical changes “frame-breaking” because they are abrupt, painful to participants, resisted by the old guard, and seen as upheaval. Nadler and Tushman (1989) called this the most risky and traumatic form of change. Kilmann and Covin (1988) asserted that most managers want to avoid the costs and risks of corporate transformations. That has only been made worse by the short-term stints that senior leadership seems to have with companies today. Kotter (2014) affirmed that people are loath to take chances without permission from superiors, so people cling to habits and fear a loss of
power and stature. Heifetz and Linsky (2017) stated that a good change agent must be willing to put his or her credibility on the line. They further noted that the change agent will face resistance, suffer the pain of disciplinary action, and feel rebukes from senior authority. Change agents are characterized as out of place, out of turn, and “too big for their britches.”

Buchanan et al. (1999) expressed that the contributions of change agents are poorly defined, understood, recognized, supported, and encouraged, and they receive inadequate financial or career rewards for helping the organization. Quinn (2000: 114) spelled out his predictions for radical change agents, saying that anyone who attempts to lead change can expect people to:

- Laugh at you—to deflect their own anxiety
- Rationalize why what you are suggesting will not work
- Treat you with moral indignation and interpret your intentions as destructive or evil
- Collectively try to isolate, humiliate, eliminate, or assassinate you

Kanter (1999) warned that critics will emerge in the middle of the change when the impacts become clear, and those who feel threatened can enter their objections and form coalitions of their own to combat the change.

**What change agents see.** The surveys and interviews revealed that change agents either knew the risks but moved forward for the cause or were assigned the role and had blind confidence that they would be safe as a result. What the results suggested, but the literature did not discuss, were the personal risks that some change agents have to deal with. Risks involving family, finances, and relationships represent some of the more long-lasting pitfalls of being an RTC agent.
Job security risks. Respondents #12 and #13 both looked at their change agent role as a temporary state, and they both understood that their task was to work themselves out of the role. As such, they proceeded without the fear of losing their job, as they were anticipating it and even set it as a goal. Having led three RTCs, Respondent #15 came to realize that no job would be a long-term relationship. Respondent #19 was threatened with firing if the respondent failed. Respondent #14 assumed the risk of termination, knowing that senior management perceived change agents as radical and hostile to the organization’s structure and culture. Respondent #4 realized it was a risk not only to the respondent’s position but the associated income to care for the respondent’s family. Respondent #12 had the same recognition and made personal financial plans in preparation, paying off debt and getting money in the bank prior to jumping into the fray. Respondent #17 spoke about personal struggles due to the obsessive approach the respondent took when leading change. It put tremendous pressure on the respondent’s family and caused enough stress to result in personal illness.

Personal doubt and fear of failure. Several respondents carried self-doubt before, during, and after RTC, indicating some of the pressure they were under and the feeling of being alone on an island. Another significant source of stress was the fear of failing. Respondent #5 feared not having the leadership ability to lead the change and that everyone would be working against the change, overtly and covertly. Respondent #19 talked about the blow to self-confidence when failure occurs. Change agents take their roles seriously, and it becomes deeply personal; yet nothing in the literature captures the essence of what these people experience.

Lack of support risks. Lack of support is prevalent when a change agent begins his or her journey. People around him or her begin to distance themselves so they are not caught in
the crossfire when the attacks begin. Then, as the change begins to affect people, others join in the attack, hoping to put down the change agent, destroy the change, and get back to business as usual. There is no safe place for the change agent as the attacks come from above and below and from peers. Isolated and alone, change agents must go to battle on their own.

As Respondent #16 indicated, “There are lots of targets on your back.” The feeling of betrayal is most impactful when senior leadership turns its back, trying to thwart a change agent’s efforts. In many cases, these are the same people who recruited the change agents to make the change, shake things up, and get business on track. One insight from Respondent #13 pinpointed the importance of focusing on the complex interactions of egos, attitudes, and politics in the organization.

**Conclusions.** The risks are significant for an RTC agent. The literature provides a good overview of the risks, even if they are often masked by more prescriptive change leadership models. When the focus shifts to the change agent rather than the process, however, the risks become very real and very personal. Nothing can capture the essence of risks and impacts better than the words of the change agents themselves. It is clear that these change agents are aware of risks generally but are not always ready to deal with the reality of how bad things could get. Companies could better prepare change agents for what will happen with stronger warnings, but changing the dynamics of risk might in turn affect how change agents approach their mission. Sometimes desperation and scarcity are motivators for people to move head-on into a problem. Entrepreneurs, for example, deal with these conditions on a regular basis. However, the literature does not discuss the personal impacts that these factors can have on family relationships, financial planning, and career planning. These areas, where theory and practice intersect, must be addressed.
Research Question 3: What Are the Resulting Personal and Professional Impacts on the Change Agent?

The impacts that change agents may face surface in the literature, but as with the risks, they are tied to the process of change leadership, not the people driving the change. Still, given the warnings in the literature, it seems foolish or even ominous for anyone to go down this path with any sense of sanity. But, as with many feats that people attempt, passion, duty, and a strong reason to move forward tend to make change agents disregard the warnings. For decades, the messages have been consistent: Burns (1978) claimed that a leader who departs from the system or group norms in a decision suffers undo attention, pressure, sanctions, and perhaps rejection or exclusion. Agocs (1997) indicated how people go into denial, attempting to “shoot the messenger.” The change agent is deemed unbalanced, too ideological, irrational, or myopic, and becomes the target of personal attacks. Nadler (1998) spoke of the price change agents pay, including demotion, resignation, and fear, or being ignored, undermined, and eventually fired. Change agents are encouraged to get back in line or get out the door. Pascale (1999) and Watkins (2013) used a metaphor from biology to explain the dynamics. Pascale characterized the resistance as the existing social order—the enemy of change. Like the body’s immune defense system, it seeks to neutralize, isolate, or destroy foreign invaders. Watkins (2013) stated that joining a new company and driving change is akin to an organ transplant, with the change agent assuming the role of the new organ.

There are many warnings about the change agent’s inevitable exit from the organization (Buchanan et al., 1999; Huy et al., 2014; Jerome & Powell, 2016). Heifetz and Linsky (2017) identified three responses from the target organization: diversion to focus the change agent on another problem, attacks to put down the change agent or the change, and
seduction to praise the change agent about his or her success in order to stop him or her from driving change. Blanchard (2009) and Gharajedaghi (2011) both used the term “kill” to describe the fate change agents face. Doyle (2001) described the fatigue change agents suffer due to continually battling resistance. Change agents feel a sense of personal overload and experience coping issues, an inability to keep learning, stress, disillusionment, and cynicism, which work to crush their passion.

Every one of these possible effects was demonstrated in the surveys and interviews of change agents. Their responses provided insight into what they experienced and how they felt about it. Overall, even though they had some awareness of the risks, they seemed shocked, insulted, and betrayed as they experienced the actual effects.

**Lack of support.** Change agents experienced a lack of support from leadership, peers, and subordinates in the organization. Respondent #9 said that support from peers ranged from “indifferent to obstructive.” Sometimes the resistance was highly political but disguised as goodwill. Respondent #16 spoke about how peers turned away, scared of the association, and how the respondent was perceived as a threat to avoid. The reaction sometimes came in the form of ridicule and threats. Respondent #14 felt judged as unintelligent, uncalculating, or unaware. Respondent #10 reported being openly perceived as a troublemaker and a bit of a crazy person. Respondents #10, #14, and #16 also indicated they were ridiculed for being idealistic and contrarian, even dangerous.

Threats were made as well: “You better knock it off. You’re advocating for the elimination of our jobs.” Respondent #14 reported, “They called me Jesus, asserting that I would ultimately end up on a cross.” Management was no help at all, even viewing the change agents themselves as threats. Respondent #18 noted, “As soon as I started making changes . . . they cut my budget.” Respondent #11 stated, “Management was patronizing and
condescending toward me.” Respondent #15 repeatedly experienced management “pulling back on the reins, then cutting me loose” once the respondent started to drive the changes the respondent was hired to implement.

A few of the change agents had support initially, but it subsided as the changes took place and started showing signs of success, at which point the prospect of having to deal with the change became real. Respondent #6 highlighted this by indicating that as soon as executive focus shifted, “the naysayers came back in full force.” Change initiatives were called “crusades” and “charades” (Respondents #14 and #15). Respondent #2 said of the change initiative, which was started by building a coalition, “When the alliance was squashed and disarmed, most of us then decided it was time to find the exit.”

**Career impacts.** All the change agents had significant career impacts due to their actions, even as this research was being conducted. Five of the respondents had already cycled through at least one other position, continuing to drive much-needed change. Respondent #15, an experienced senior-level manager, had been through three job changes during the course of this research project and had decided to no longer look at any job as a long-term relationship: “I have to realize that I’m not the most popular person.” Respondent #14 moved from a career executive to a coach/trainer after the company where the respondent had spent decades shut down any hope of career advancement despite the respondent’s heroic efforts. Respondent #17 recognized that tenure in any company would be 3–4 years before the organization chose to terminate the respondent or the respondent decided to leave. In fact, as this research concluded, a follow-up with the respondents identified that all had left the companies in which they had led RTC, with most forced out by unbearable conditions. Management forced Respondent #18 into working 14-hour days, 7 days a week.
**Personal impacts.** Perhaps the most disturbing finding in this research—and the reason it was initiated—was the costly personal impacts on RTC agents. The literature notes what they might face at work but does not address the effects on the change agents’ personal lives. They endure this pain in the service of their passion for change, and they sacrifice themselves for the well-being of others who may never recognize, acknowledge, or appreciate the value that the change brings. Respondent #15 reported feeling like a “caged animal.” Change agents face tremendous pressure at home from spouses who also may suffer the consequences, or in many cases actively discourage the change agent to protect the family income source. The difficulty of dealing with the possible, even inevitable, loss of income is extremely real for the family. The change agents talked about the burden of not being able to escape the pain they endured at work and how they often brought problems home with them. This became a source of stress in the home. Respondent #17’s spouse suggested, “Maybe you’re the one with the issue.” Threats, attacks, and ridicule extend to the family as well. At company social events, family members might receive threats from others in the company or their families. In some cases, the change agent’s own family joins in, trying to put him or her down to force him or her back in line with everyone else.

**Conclusions.** The impacts on the change agents interviewed for this research exposed the incredible passion and perseverance of these people and their families. They endured tremendous pressure from all directions in their careers and personal lives. They did not receive much support, and when they did, it was only a matter of time until the rug was pulled out from under them. Often, change agents do not receive recognition, acknowledgement, or credit for sacrificing themselves to improve an organization and facilitate the ability to survive in a complex, fast-changing environment. Once they get the
internal satisfaction from any level of success, they strengthen their resolve to go further or move on to help someone else.

A few of the respondents made a career of being an outside change agent as a consultant or advisor, isolating themselves from the pain of the effects and turning it into opportunity. Others continued to seek employment and challenges in companies looking for a change agent to move them forward. Some respondents held on to a vision of succeeding and being appreciated for their efforts. In the realm of corporate transformations, which help ensure companies’ survivability, these people and their families are the unsung heroes. Without their courageous efforts and their ability to endure pain, many others would suffer the effects of failing organizations that find themselves obsolete. In complex contexts, leaders must destabilize rather than stabilize, encourage innovation rather than be the innovators, interpret change rather than create change, and manage words rather than manage people (Quinn, 2000).

**Summary**

This chapter contains the results of the analysis. In it, I connect the analysis back to the research questions and demonstrate the consistency of the analysis with a descriptive research methodology to give a phenomenological view of the change agent’s mind-set before, during, and after leading RTC. Nineteen participants completed an open-ended questionnaire, and then follow-up phone interviews were conducted with 6 of the participants. The sampling method was purposive and included people whose experience leading RTC I had firsthand knowledge of. I manually analyzed the results of the surveys and my phone interview notes using grounded methods of data analysis in qualitative research.
Based on the analysis of the survey and interview data, eight common themes emerged in the lived experiences of these change agents during and after leading RTC in organizations:

1. The decision was very personal and involved family.
2. Change agents were motivated or inspired by a previous experience.
3. They were driven by a strong vision for the future.
4. They were at the end of their rope.
5. They took known risks to their career and personal finances.
6. They faced strong opposition on all fronts.
7. They were initially supported but then abandoned by management.
8. They had some success but ultimately left.

While organizations face the challenge of having to change to meet the needs of their customers, consumers, and constituents, they do not seem able to set up change agents for success. It appears that driving change relies on heroics, resulting in terrible stress to the change agent.

Chapter 5 provides a summary of the research, a discussion of the implications for practice, and opportunities for further research in this area.

**CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

**Overview**

In this chapter, I summarize the findings from this study, discuss the limitations of the methods employed, offer some practical implications for organizations and change agents, and suggest further research to build on this work. The chapter closes with an autobiographical reflection on my journey with RTC and how it has altered my attitudes, beliefs, and practices about organizational change.
Summary

The purpose of this study was to seek the direct lived experiences of change agents in their efforts to introduce RTC in their organizations. The goal was to uncover the types of triggers that drive change agents in deciding to initiate radical change and the resulting consequences of doing so from the change agent’s perspective. This phenomenological view allowed me to examine the dynamics of RTC from the perspective of the change agents. There were two focal points: First, I identified the antecedents that prompted the change agents to take on the challenges of transformational change, whether they were aware of the triggers at the time, and what those triggers were. Second, I explored the consequences of leading RTC as experienced by the change agents. The resultant findings could help organizations that face increasingly complex environments where the ability to change quickly is a strategic capability and they will need to rely on people stepping up to lead. How can they best develop and support the change agents they so desperately need? And from the change agents’ perspective, why should they step up when the consequences could be quite painful?

By examining the lived experiences of people who have led RTC, I posed the following research questions:

1. What factors trigger a “go” moment in leaders initiating a radical change in an organization?
2. What risks do change agents perceive to themselves in leading radical organizational change?
3. What are the resulting personal and professional impacts on the change agent?

To conduct this study, I collected written surveys from 19 people who had been through the experience of leading RTC at least once. The sampling method was purposive.
The participants were primarily involved in leading the change from traditional product development to a lean/agile approach in the IT/software industry. This industry shift, which began in the mid-1990s and continues at a rapid pace today, meets the criteria of radical change (Pelrine, 2011). The participants received a survey containing 10 open-ended questions designed to address the research questions.

I conducted follow-up interviews with 6 participants via phone to dive deeper into some of their reflections on what motivated them to move forward with the change and what happened as a result. I manually analyzed the data from the surveys and interviews and identified common themes and patterns. In Chapter 4, I provided an overview of the data collected and the themes that emerged from the participants’ responses and then connected these back to the research questions and literature on the topic.

**Overall Conclusions**

Changing how a group of people perform any activity may be difficult because it involves changing habits (Duhigg, 2012). The person who decides to lead a change understands his or her past experiences, assesses his or her current context, identifies known risks, develops a complementary leadership style, and thrusts himself or herself into the unknown. Change agents enter into a complex context where there are no right answers and they must begin to use what Snowden and Boone (2007) identified as a probe-sense-respond approach. An approach or solution must emerge and be accepted as an appropriate response, and patience will be vital to success. Change agents’ passion and commitment push them forward as they face tremendous opposition and try their best to survive. The literature and the corporate approach to leadership development do not prepare people for what they will face both at work and at home.
Higgs and Rowland (2001) identified eight clusters of change leadership competencies that had a positive impact on change agent readiness. The changes they identified were of the planned type identified earlier: (a) change initiation, (b) change impact, (c) change facilitation, (d) change leadership, (e) change learning, (f) change execution, (g) change presence, and (h) change technology. These competencies can provide potential change agents with the tools and techniques to draw on during organizational change. The question to be asked is, Are people with this training more likely to trigger and lead radical change? Are they prepared to carry out such change? And even if they are prepared, will they heed the warnings of what may happen to them as a result?

The sense of risk and going into the unknown is part of what motivates change agents. The learning journey, the sense of risk-taking, the excitement of facing the unknown can be great motivators. Snowden and Boone (2007) asserted that conditions of scarcity often produce more creative results than conditions of abundance. Taking that away—trying to codify radical change—could ruin the allure of a successful radical change. In a sense, leading a change of this magnitude is similar to a start-up environment where an entrepreneurial approach and mind-set become survival skills. The risk, lack of clear direction, unknown challenges to be faced, discoveries to be made, difficult problems to solve, lack of resources, and potentially high reward or complete failure, are the typical environments for innovations to take place.

The consequences of leading change appear from the data to be worse than what change agents might imagine as they enter into the change. The cognitive process of trying to minimize anticipation is simply a coping mechanism that allows people to move forward, a way of dealing with the fear. Change agents are ridiculed, attacked, and marginalized, and most established employees work to eliminate them and the change. The change agents
interviewed in this study all had major career changes as a result of driving RTC. A few have moved on to an external consultant role, allowing them to introduce change into organizations and hopefully motivating internal change agents to step forward. Families have been affected, personal finances impacted, and reputations attacked. The bullying of change agents exposes a basic human reaction to radical changes. It is not a problem that can be solved by models, n-step processes, and identification of leadership styles. The change agents, whether they are aware of it or not, are operating in a complex context. It seems that they were not aware of or curious about identifying what the context was.

These types of complex changes are abrupt, and there is little time to analyze the situation and choose a path. This is what Snowden and Boone (2007) would indicate for an obvious or complicated context per the Cynefin framework described in Chapter 2. There are two issues here: First, change agents do not have the time to analyze the situation, nor would it be effective; they must probe first and let the solution emerge. Second, everyone involved in the system may see the problem from different perspectives or believe there is not a problem at all. This is the criticism of any model that prescribes what to do in multiple contexts or any single context. While these models can be helpful, when the change comes, those mechanisms will be the last thing on a change agent’s radar. Experience, instinct, confidence, lower fear threshold, and appetite for risk are factors that can determine their action in that moment.

In the world of systems thinking, Kim (1999) provided a framework that probes the consequences of problems to identify underlying systemic structures and mental models and expose other perspectives in order to address the roots of a problem. By doing so, it is possible to develop higher-level actions with long-term positive effects. The levels of perspective framework, commonly known as the systems thinking iceberg (Huigens, 2010),
helps probe below the surface to reveal the broader scope of an issue. Figure 11 illustrates how the iceberg model can show what is happening in the context of RTC.

The events at the top of the iceberg in Figure 11 are the reactions as change agents attempt to drive a change. These are the actions taken in the short term. At the next level are the patterns that arise when trying to adapt to the events. Here are common themes that a number of change agents experience. Below the patterns are the structures that describe the forces at play contributing to the patterns. Organizational change typically happens at this level. But in order to change systemic structures, a change in the mental model is often required to contribute to the formation of the structure. This mental model is created in the pursuit of the vision.

The iceberg model illustrates the challenge posed by RTC. There is no common vision to make change agents successful, so everyone works according to the established mental models and structures. This results in the events above and just below the surface. Mental models are strong forces that are deeply engrained in the brain. To change the outcomes, these mental models must be reframed to align with the vision. The vision, once shared, could allow the creation of new models and structures that would change the events and patterns that are the current norm. Creating a strong vision for the future has been a key

**Figure 11:** The Iceberg Model
**Vision:** Create, Develop, and Celebrate change agents in their ability to move themselves and others towards a better future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Level</th>
<th>Change agent fired, reassigned, forced out, leave organization</th>
<th>Events</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Visible</td>
<td>Resisted, Ridiculed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Level</th>
<th>Soft Facts</th>
<th>Patterns</th>
<th>Structures</th>
<th>Mental Models</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Orgs need change more often</td>
<td>Train people thinking they will lead change</td>
<td>We don’t like change or anyone who drives it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>More change agents are needed</td>
<td>Punishment is stronger than rewards</td>
<td>We like patterns (habits) for repetitive activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Less people willing to take risks</td>
<td>Safety in the herd – stay in social norm</td>
<td>We only change when we absolutely need to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Biologically programmed to remain in stasis - survival</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


step in any of the change models produced to date. However, as this study illustrates, someone has to be courageous enough to suggest going through the exercise to examine this issue, creating a dilemma that puts the change agent back in the place where he or she began. Identifying how to harness RTC requires someone to lead an RTC about how organizations process changes. The one who identifies the issue and suggests the need for a radical change may be subjected to the types of responses described in this study.

**Limitations**

This research was based on my experiences with RTC and the resulting effects. I gathered data with the intention of surfacing the lived experiences of other change agents that drove RTC and accomplished that goal. I am active in the industry, and I teach, coach, and
advise companies on the design and implementation of RTC, specifically agile product
development practices and lean management techniques. I have been personally involved in
at least three RTCs over the course of approximately 20 years and was heavily involved as an
instructor/consultant for many companies during the 13 years previous to this writing.

The respondents came from a sample of 25 people whom I personally asked to
complete the survey, knowing they had been involved in at least one RTC. Informal
discussions with other people at client sites or participants in training classes continually
reinforced the importance of this research and the common experiences shared by many
outside of the 19 participants interviewed. Having experience as an RTC agent and feeling
many of the impacts reported, I recognize the possibility of bias affecting my selection of the
participants and my examination of the qualitative data. I made every attempt to use my
experience to help participants open up about their own experiences, which was the core of
the data gathered.

In my consulting work, I continue to analyze the stories of others to determine if
opposing views exist such that a change agent’s experience does not correlate with the
findings of this study. I chose a method of research that would reinforce rather than detract
from what I wanted to have as an outcome of this dissertation work. I have been transparent
about my selection of participants and the manner in which the questionnaire was developed.
As a phenomenological researcher, I used my personal experiences to expand what the
participants were willing to share, especially in follow-up interviews. The number of studies
in this context has been sparse due to the fact that many researchers do not have personal
experience with leading radical change and that only shared experiences can open up dialog
with participants.
Implications for Practice

Pfeffer (2016) had critical words about leadership development efforts. He cited estimates of $14–$50 billion or more spent on leadership development every year in the United States alone. Despite this investment, all indicators show that leadership development efforts are ineffective and change leadership is not improving. The inspiring videos and gimmicky titles associated with these efforts are completely disconnected from organizational reality. In a biography of Steve Jobs, one of the most impactful change agents of modern times, Isaacson (2011) concluded that leadership is not about winning popularity contests or being the most beloved person in an organization. He quoted Gary Loveman, the former CEO of Caesars Entertainment: “If you want to be liked, get a dog.” Pfeffer concluded that the “monomaniacal focus and energy so useful (if not essential) in bringing great ideas to life are not always pleasant for those in close proximity.” Change agents should independently learn as much as they can about themselves, situations, theories, practices, and human behavior, so when they find themselves in a position to lead RTC, the proper behavior patterns will kick in like the instincts that professional athletes develop in disciplined practice. This is more of an individual development issue than a corporate responsibility, but the two are intertwined in a complex dance of change.

There should be an honest examination of the leadership development field, though this will be difficult considering the field’s massive momentum for so many decades. Questioning the status quo will require yet another RTC agent to arise in the field, and the fierce opposition that person will face is incomprehensible. Agocs (1997) indicated that RTC agents must have strong survival instincts. They must have courage and commitment in addition to knowledge and skill. This highlights the problem, as leadership in these contexts cannot be taught; it must come from within the change agent.
Baliga and Hunt (1988) identified the evolving, complex contexts in which leaders must operate and the requirement to apply different styles and approaches in these changing contexts. This suggests the possibility of temporary leadership assignments based on the current context. Under such a situation, what is the career progression for a radical change agent? And how might this affect followers knowing that the person leading the change that affects them most will soon be gone? This might promote the all-too-common belief that “this too shall pass,” and the organization simply learns to weather the storm. Perhaps newer, more progressive organizations will lead the way and open up new ideas about organizational roles and responsibilities. These organizations will start from that base rather than having to move toward it. Once there is a proven path, the change loses its radical nature and then moves to a more complicated context. I have seen this in software organizations as lean/agile practices become the norm. Organizations lag far behind if they have not at least considered moving themselves. Or, the leadership crisis may become so bad that there will be no choice but to take a different approach than in the past. Scarcity and desperation historically have been great motivators for changing the status quo.

One of the implications I have considered based on my own experience is some type of backing for change agents. When I led the RTC to agile practices as a vice president, I had what is known as an executive agreement. This is a common practice for company executives. The basic idea is that due to the limited positions available for executive-level positions, and in consideration of the fact that an executive’s performance could be affected by forces outside of his or her control, should the executive be terminated for anything other than cause (e.g., violating company policies, etc.), the executive will receive some remuneration, typically in the form of payment. The amount is usually substantial (from 3 to
6 or more months of salary) and is meant to provide some stability until the executive finds another position.

When I began to drive the radical change, the executive agreement was the last thing on my mind, but as I encountered resistance from those above me, I found comfort and courage knowing that I had it. It freed me from some of the fear of leading my team to do something radically different. Building on this idea as a means to assist RTC agents today, an independent “insurance” system could be established, whereby some financial or career support could be provided to help change agents and their families deal with what could happen to them, as well as give the change agent some confidence in moving forward. This is akin to Foucault’s parrhesiastic contract, discussed in Chapter 2. Today, RTC agents bear this burden completely on their own. Organizations get the benefits of their sacrifice but provide little support along the way. Such assurances could be part of an employment package offered when someone is asked or assigned to lead RTC. However, in my experience, the key was deciding to act first and then realize later that I had assurance in the form of a “hall pass.” The downside to this idea is that chaos could ensue if leaders with these agreements begin leading change simply because they have the assurance.

Another approach would be to make change leadership a recognized profession. People will develop the skills, aptitude, and mind-set to recognize conditions and contexts and can be trained in possible responses. This would allow the change agent to have more knowledge and eventually experiences that will reduce the personal impact of driving change. Today, companies rely on outsiders to do this heavy work, but unless the outsiders feel passionate and treat the process as if it were in the context of their own company, they may just provide guidance that will keep them engaged instead of taking action that might
anger the client. In these cases, the change agents do not have skin in the game. They will not be there for the long term and could make the situation much worse.

The missing component of these and other approaches is the passion and commitment the RTC agent brings to the situation. In my own practice, to avoid this situation, I make it a professional responsibility to truly care about the success of my clients. I take personal responsibility for how they experience change. I accomplish this by being open, honest, and forthright in my advice. Being a trusted advisor means developing a good relationship with people at all levels quickly so I can provide proper guidance. I often have to deliver harsh observations about their current situation, but I promise them I will not hold back out of self-interest. The emotional connection to the change and the people impacted by it is a critical success factor. Without it, change becomes “just a job,” and to make the job efficient, models must be created as recipes to be followed.

Leadership in the RTC contexts with no known pattern of response borders on the complex and chaotic in the Cynefin framework (Snowden & Boone, 2007). Using recursive logic in the context of the containing system, a probe-sense-respond approach is necessary, which means the solution will emerge from iterations and experiments, requiring a great deal of discipline and patience. In the fast-moving environment of software/system product development, these two characteristics are in short supply.

**Recommendations for Research**

Given what has been uncovered in this study, a number of other areas become interesting for further research. First, if the practice of leading RTC were more widespread, more people with experience leading RTC could take on new challenges. This research project was focused primarily on software product development and IT organizations that implement agile development practices. These practices are the sisters of lean and lean/Six
Sigma, which have similar historical dynamics found in the literature outside this study. Exploring other professional, political, social, or industry contexts would deepen the identification of this phenomenon. The manufacturing and supply chain sectors, especially in the automobile industry, went through this type of radical change in the 1970s and 1980s. Researching early adopters of those approaches would be an excellent area for comparison.

In addition, it would be worthwhile to expand the population under study to other global contexts and cultures. In this study, I primarily engaged people in the United States, with the exception of one respondent, who was living and working in Switzerland. Researchers could investigate how change agents are treated in workplaces around the globe. My experience has been with global organizations, and while nothing I have seen detracts from what I have uncovered here, I am relying on anecdotal data only. Looking at this phenomenon in a global context would provide a better indication of the elements of change that relate to human behavior overall.

Finally, a study focusing on this issue from the perspective of senior leadership or individuals in an organization where RTC took place would provide other views of the problem, which would benefit the development of potential coping strategies. This is an opportunity to change the perspective and look at the problem from other angles. What does an RTC agent look like from a superior’s perspective? Although I have described some of the reactions in this study, an understanding of the cause of these reactions and the related lived experiences would provide another piece of the puzzle. Similarly, a study of the perspective of the people who are the target of RTC, perhaps focusing on the impacts on family members as they go through this phenomenon, could explore the lived experiences of these people.
Personal Reflection

My experience with RTC has been a personal, professional, and academic journey. It began at the onset of my career as soon as I gained some confidence in my own abilities. I started to question how things were done, and at times I started to transgress the traditional boundaries. I noticed how the people around me responded to it (mostly negatively) and saw the results (mostly very positive). That cycle continued until I began to gain confidence beyond my technical skills, moving into management and leadership positions, and realized that I could truly make a difference.

I have been in many different contexts in my 35-year career, each providing opportunities to test my leadership skills. On occasion, I have found myself in situations where there were no answers and I had to find a way. Some of these situations seemed to require a new approach that was beyond what anyone else had done previously. I did it out of a sense of passion, caring, and personal responsibility. Each experience ended in either my resigning or my firing. Each case provoked a high level of frustration as I believed I was doing everything in my power to improve the conditions. But, as illustrated, there is only so much an organization is willing to take. I kept studying, learning, applying techniques, and finding ways to adapt my style to discover what was most effective, so that every time an opportunity surfaced, I had a more complete toolbox to draw from.

In 2003 I had an opportunity to make a change when I was the vice president of development at a software company in the Philadelphia area. The organization was a pioneer in applying agile development practices to larger, more established companies. Prior to this change, agile had mostly been used in small organizations with new product development. This was a true RTC. I had plenty to draw from based on my knowledge and experience, but none of that was a conscious thought at the time. I was operating on pure instinct, trying to
move myself and 150 others through a very difficult change. My colleagues and I fought fiercely among ourselves, while the rest of the company and the global software community ridiculed and laughed at us or wrote us off as losing our minds. It was only after things had stabilized that I even considered what had happened and how we had accomplished it.

Eventually, I left that company for two main reasons. First, I was bored and exhausted by what we had done. Secondly, I felt completely unappreciated by my peers and superiors in the company, who fought me the whole way and once it became a success attempted to take credit for their support in making it happen. I was suffering from stress-related medical issues, and my family life was strained from my obsessive focus on improving the situation at work. These were echoed by the participants in this study. The silver lining was how the lives of 150 people and their families were positively affected by the change. That was the driving force that kept me going.

That brutal, but successful, experience led me to pursue my master of science in organizational dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania. I had a hunger to understand how and why this took place. Why was I the one to step forward while others ignored a terrible situation that obviously needed to be addressed? My pursuit of a master’s degree put me in a constant state of discovery. I changed jobs twice in the 5 years I pursued that degree, and in 2006 I became an independent consultant focused on the use of agile product development practices to help organizations around the world take on their own RTCs. However, my curiosity was not satisfied by the master’s program, as I still wanted to understand this dynamic further.

Through consulting, I have helped hundreds of organizations and thousands of people. I continue to hear the intense pain of change agents, listen to their experiences, see their frustrations, and try to guide them based on my own experience. The more I heard it all,
the more I wanted to find answers. This led me to the Doctoral Program in Strategic Leadership at Thomas Jefferson University. Over the next 3 years, the program shaped my research questions and eventually this research. I am forever changed in my understanding of radical change and the courageous people who step up to lead it. Instead of feeling alone, I realized others were going through their change journeys feeling isolated as well. The 19 people I interviewed for this study anxiously awaited the completion of this research paper so they could realize they are part of a bigger community.

This research has only strengthened my resolve to continue my mission of supporting companies and the great people within them in taking on the hard work and challenge of changing and surviving in the increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous environments in which they find themselves. Through the data, I identified that leading change, especially RTC, is very personal. Organizations spend a large amount of time and money developing leaders. Although there have been many models to follow in leading change, most change efforts fail because the corporate need for change is greater than the supply of people willing to take the risk to become a change agent. The consequences are that organizations cannot adapt to meet the needs of their consumers, along with a lot of frustrated, stressed, and physically and emotionally damaged change agents who, despite their sacrifices, almost always wind up tossed from the organization in some way. Once the change agents are gone, the organizations often revert to a less-than-optimal state and wait for the next change agent to drive the next push.

Perhaps this is just part of the human experience, and the constant change organizations experience is just part of human nature. Patterns and mental models provide some sense of order to keep people from entering states of complete chaos. Just as in nature mutations help ensure survival over long periods, every once in a while a major
transformation changes the paradigm. Once volatility of the new paradigm begins to fade, the new patterns are in place, and the organization enters a new “normal.”

This journey has brought me back to the place I began, wondering if there is a formula for creating change agents. I believe, as the study shows, there is not. Leading change is an emergent, complex system involving individual personalities, politics, and experiences along with situational, temporal, and intensity factors. Organizations can give people the tools, but no one can predict when an RTC agent will emerge.

Change agents are warriors in a battle to find ways for humans to organize for today’s challenges and for what lies ahead. I feel honored, and completely humbled, by the doctoral journey, and although I am at a terminal point in my formal academic pursuits, I am more determined than ever to keep learning and never stop trying to improve the world in my own small way.

Here’s to the crazy ones. The misfits. The rebels. The troublemakers. The round pegs in the square holes. The ones who see things differently. They’re not fond of rules, and they have no respect for the status quo. You can quote them, disagree with them, glorify and vilify them. About the only thing you can’t do is ignore them because they change things. They push the human race forward. And while some may see them as crazy, we see genius. Because the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world, are the ones who do.

– Apple, “Think Different” (1997)
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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview preamble:

My name is Bob Schatz. I’m requesting your help in a research project to complete my Doctorate in Strategic Leadership at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, PA. My research concerns the factors that determine a leader’s decision to take on a radical change in an organization, and how one experiences this activity personally and professionally. In our fast-moving, high-change environment, organizations are becoming increasingly reliant on people who can lead initiatives that require transformational change, where there is a radically new way of thinking, organizing, and operating. My study will examine the determinants that influence how a change agent takes this path, and the perceptions of how these agents are treated by the people around them.

Your identity and all information you provide will be anonymous; your responses will be aggregated and coded with other participants to identify themes.

If you are interested in participating, I would appreciate receiving a brief description about your own experience (omitting organizational and personal details) on the form below. Please submit before March 23, 2018. If you have questions, please email bobschatz@yahoo.com or call me at 215-435-3240.

1. Describe a time when you led a major radical transformational change in an organization?

2. What was your role in the organization?

3. Were there any personal/professional risks you were aware of going into the change process?

4. Were there any personal feelings of a “go” moment you were aware of as you decided to drive this change?

5. What were your personal thoughts and feelings as you started the process?

6. How do you feel you were treated in the change process (by management, peers, employees, family, friends)?

7. Did you consider any implications based on the success or failure of the change?

8. What was your eventual fate with that organization?

9. What came next for you? What role do you currently have in your present company?

10. Are there factors in your life or career that you feel contributed to your recognition of the need for change, and your ability to drive it?
25 January 2018

TO: Bob Schatz  
FROM: Prof. R.M. Shain  
RE: PU18-5

Dear Mr. Schatz,

In accordance with the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) policies and 45 CFR 46, the Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects, I am pleased to inform you that the Philadelphia University IRB has approved your research protocol through its expedited review process.

Project Title: Truth and Consequences: An Exploration of the Initiation Triggers and Resulting Impacts of Radical Transformational Change on the Change Agent

In accordance with federal law, this approval is effective for one calendar year from the date of this letter. If your research extends beyond that date, you must notify the IRB. Please reference the IRB application number noted above in any future communications regarding this research.

Good luck with your research. Sincerely,

R.M. Shain, Ph.D.  
Chair/Administrator East Falls Campus IRB
APPENDIX C: CURRICULUM VITAE

BOB SCHATZ

100 Danby Court, Churchville, PA 18966
bobschatz@agileinfusion.com • Cell Phone: 215-435-3240
LinkedIn: http://www.linkedin.com/in/bobschatz
Website: http://www.agileinfusion.com

SUMMARY

**Dynamic Technology Executive** with over 35 years of successfully building, shaping and honing great leading-edge software development organizations. After achieving goals of improving the products, people and processes, and grooming the next leaders, left all previous employers on good terms as they continue to experience success today.

As a recognized leader in the Agile Software Development Community, gained a reputation of someone who can lead an organization through both the technical, organizational, and cultural changes needed to make agile techniques like Scrum and XP successful for an organization. Led the highly-publicized turnaround at Primavera Systems, working closely with the thought leaders like Ken Schwaber and Bob Martin. Continue to advise other companies and speak at industry events on this subject.

Attributes include:

- Strong strategic and tactical leader
- Highly successful change agent and leader. Focus on getting everyone aligned to deliver value and meet the goals of the organization
- Excellent team builder and motivator.
- Ability to quickly adapt to new technologies
- Excellent interpersonal and communications skills at all levels. Strong listener and collaborator
- Excellent problem-solving skills in mission-critical environments. Unique ability in times of crisis to maintain focus and rally others to drive issue resolution.
- Demonstrated ability to create, grow, and maintain excellent customer, vendor, partner and employee relationships. A leader people want to work for and who knows how to get things done!
EMLOYMENT HISTORY

Agile Infusion LLC Bucks County, PA
Owner, Senior Consultant & Advisor
July 2006 – present

www.agileinfusion.com is a consultancy that I started which provides strategic level consulting to organizations looking at ways to innovate in their software development process. Leveraging the experiences in large-scale enterprise application development and adopting agile techniques, Agile Infusion is built on the concept of teaching organizations how to continuously improve in order to deliver value to customers and stakeholders.

- Partnering with other agile consulting firms to provide specialized advisory for executives and managers in developing strategies for adopting new software development approaches
- Clients include: NASA, Apple, SAP, Disney, CA, Cisco, Lucasfilms, Avid, HP, H&R Block, S&P Global, Jewelry TV, Scripps Networks, Dow Jones, ASK.com, Intergraph, SunGard, Accenture, GAO, DoD, Office of The President of the US, Minitab, Comcast, The Hartford, and many others.

Solstice Software, Inc. Claymont, DE
VP & Chief Development Officer
April 2005 – July 2006

A growing start-up software company and niche player in the enterprise integration-testing arena. Main product is an Automated Testing Platform for Enterprise Integration, Web Services, and Service-Oriented Architecture (SOA). Company size: 25. Team Size: 10

- Restructured IT environment to provide stability and efficiency and establish agile development practices in order to get product features out faster.
- Company merged with competitor, and subsequently included in IBM portfolio of products

Primavera Systems, Inc. Bala Cynwyd, PA
Vice President, Development
October 2001 – April 2005

Leading the project management software industry since 1983, this top-notch commercial software developer delivers integrated, scalable project management solutions for the entire enterprise for multiple industries. Company size: 450. Team size: 130. Now part of Oracle.

- Recruited by Primavera due to excellent track record for delivering high-quality enterprise systems and reputation for building highly motivated teams. Accomplished goals of building a high morale world-class development organization capable of delivering high value products to meet growing market demand.
- With budget responsibility of $12M, managed staff including 4 Directors and 7 Managers
- Enabled Primavera to gain global recognition as an early, well-publicized, agile success story
- Reduced cost of R&D from 35% of Rev to 17% of Revenue
- Improved throughput by over 40%; Quality improvements of 90%
- Led vision to bring collaborative functionality to enterprise project management software through strategic and technology partnership
- Developed customer relationships to build trust and make them referenceable
Liquent (formerly ESPS, Inc.), Ft. Washington, PA  
**Vice President, Research & Development**  
May 1995 – October 2001

Information Management Solutions for the Pharmaceutical Industry. Its enterprise product has changed the way pharmaceutical companies and the regulatory agencies around the world process drug applications. Size: 200. Team size: 65. FDA Regulated. Early PDF Innovator; Adobe Ventures 1st Investment 1995

- Co-founded startup from 7 people and created a world-class global organization that revolutionized the regulatory process and paved the way for PDF to be used on massive scale.
- Key player in revenue growth from $0 to $30M+; Facilitated IPO in 2000;

GE / Lockheed-Martin Corp., Valley Forge, PA  
**Nov 1983 – May 1995**

A leader in large systems development for military and other government agencies

**Manager, Site Installation, Checkout, and Test** (1991-1995)  
**Sr. Staff Engineer, Special Programs Software** (1990-1991)  
**Software Engineering Project Leader** (1988-1990)  
**Sr. Programmer/Analyst** (1983-1988); Security Clearances: DoD Top Secret; SBI

**COLLEGE EDUCATION**

**Thomas Jefferson University** Philadelphia, PA  
**Doctor of Management-Strategic Leadership,** 2016-2019  
*Dissertation: The Impacts of Radical Transformational Change on the Change Agent*

**University of Pennsylvania** Philadelphia, PA  
**MS Organizational Dynamics,** 2009  
*Thesis: This Might Hurt – Transforming Software Organizations*

**Temple University**, Philadelphia, PA  
**BS Computer and Information Sciences,** 1984

**ADDITIONAL TRAINING**

- GE Management Development Program Graduate
- GE Work Out Team Leader
- GE Engineering Process Improvement Certification and Instructor
- Software Quality Assurance and Testing
- Pharmaceutical Systems Validation
- Finance and Accounting for non-Financial Managers
- Certified Scrum Master CSM & Professional CSP
- Certified Scrum Product Owner
- Certified Scrum Trainer CST (Agile Development)
- Lean Management Certification
AWARDS RECEIVED

- GE General Managers’ Awards – 3 times
- Air Force Distinguished Service Award – Civilian (Desert Storm)
- Liquid Executive of the Year

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS AND PUBLICATIONS

- Agile Philly 2015 – Roots of Agile...Dr. W Edwards Deming and the Red Bead Experiment
- Agile Prague 2015 – Don’t DO Agile
- Project Zone Congress 2014 – Creating the Magic by Engaging Customers
- 10 Crucial Question Developers Should Ask Employers Information Week (2013)
- The Zero Defect Vision Agile Journal Website (2011 and 2012)
- Sprint Reviews – Mastering the Art of Feedback Scrum Alliance Website (2009)
- Scrum Gathering 2009 – Legally Agile – A View from Lady Justice (Agile Contracts)
- Scrum Gathering 2009 – Keeping NASA Flying with Scrum – Case Study
- Agile Philly September 2006 – Organizational Change – Becoming a Change Agent
- Capital One Agile Forum May 2006 Keynote Speaker on Creating the Agile Organization
- 2005 Scrum Gathering – Keynote speech on Organizational Transition to Agile
- IEEE Software May/June 2005 – Article: Primavera Gets Agile
- Project Manager Today 2005 – Article: Breaking the Mold with Agile PM
- PMI Silicon Valley 2005 – Primavera’s Journey to Agile
- Analyst Reports on agile development for Forrester and Cutter Consortium
- SDForum at Xerox PARC 2004 – Keynote speech on Implementing Agile Development
- Application Development Trends 2004 – Agile Breaks on Through to the Other Side
- Software Management Conference 2002 – The Making of Managers
  Panel with Esther Derby, Gerry Weinberg, Johanna Rothman