Best Practices in Change Management:
Critical Process Variables

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Best Practices in Change Management: Critical Process Variables[1]

There is nothing so practical as a good theory.

Kurt Lewin[1]

How do educational leaders manage change in colleges and universities? What process variables like faculty involvement must we monitor? What do we do about resistance to change? The motive for organizing the research I will report is simple enough: What do we think we know about planned change in colleges and universities, especially the layered change introduced by a searching self-study?

After a few remarks to set our context, we'll consider topics like: planned change and self study, contemporary challenges in higher education, how colleges are different as an organization type, Robert Zemsky's powerful idea that a *theory of change* is needed for real change, types of resistance to change, new assumptions about people in organizations, and ten critical process variables to be monitored.[2] The paper closes with a summary of insights for better practice as well as suggestions for new theory.

The ideas we discuss come from three domains of personal experience and my narrative moves among them: first, my training in applied social psychology in the late 1960s where I was well read in organizational and social change; second, more than thirty years as an academic leader of five different colleges; and, third, my recent service as a Commissioner for Middle States where a self-study for peer review is the major tool for planned change. I've searched the current literature on planned change in both higher education and business, and also hunted for practical insights in the literature on organizational psychology.

This paper is a progress report with the purpose of putting useful resources before my colleagues. While the basic tools for change making may not have changed much, advances in theory building, especially new assumptions about the complex nature of human beings as well as organizations, seem promising and of potential use for educators. Several of the issues for theory and advanced practice we discuss need reactions from my colleagues and an expanded conversation.

By talking about the practical value of good theory in our opening quotation, Kurt Lewin, founding father of social psychology, stressed the integration of theory and practice, a guiding theme is his work as well as for most of his students. Still, academic literatures on

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organizational change tend to emphasize formal theory and various abstract models whereas my interest is less theory *qua* theory than what we can learn about applied organizational change. My purpose is to introduce the most important ideas, people to read, and resources that interested parties can use later. I hope this paper carries forward the Lewinian spirit of integrating theory and practice. And I can't think of a better playground for trying to integrate theory and practice than trying to improve human, all-too-human institutions as Nietzsche might put it.

Planned change occurs at different system levels. Adrianna Kezar argues that organizational and system change share many dynamics, but that systems require additional concepts to try to affect change such as: attention to intermediary organizations, external levers that apply pressure and monitor progress, networks through which change is diffused and so on.[3]

Our focus will be free-standing colleges and small universities rather than great public systems like the SUNY, CUNY, PASSHE or CALSTATE systems, which have been under such stress. Deborah Meier, a secondary educator whose work I admire, talks about a good school having a "thick, complex and powerful counter-culture" by which to counter the pulls and tugs of the dominant culture.[4] Using her concept, let me suggest that the thick culture of a free-standing, long-established college or small university is not much easier to change than a system.

Varieties of Planned Change in Self Study

I believe in the great potential of self study to plan change in a college and have personally organized a dozen or so over thirty years for five colleges in three regional associations, not to mention those done for state agencies. I think the intellectual puzzles we surface in serious self study are fascinating.[5] Changing human organizations is neither simple nor straightforward and this work challenges us to be at our best.

Planned change, of course, comes in many flavors from the vision of a new president to a self-study required by a regional accreditation association that suddenly looms large on the calendar, a distraction to business as usual, or so it may seem.

Our focus will be planned change in colleges, especially that stimulated by self study. Planned change stimulated in self-study results in a compendium of recommendations for change—a few may be large lifts like creating a new college. Most are modest to moderate improvements, occurring at different institutional levels. A self-study may advance 50 or more changes and perhaps only 5% of that number will take heavy lifting and some luck. The small pieces of an improved procedure in admissions or better written prior learning policy add quality, of course. But I want us to think about planned change when we take on structural or

cultural elements like a proposed a new graduate school, or going from same sex to co-education, or moving a moribund college toward mostly online study.

Let's not exaggerate or advance a false dichotomy of success or failure. Sure, change is difficult. But if one were to carefully evaluate self-study results, we might find a patchwork quilt of quiet progress on the big stuff, many small pieces achieved, with some backsliding after the case, not usually reported. Some recommendations, large and small, get lost in the process. Still, we change agents could manage the process better, especially given the importance of higher education to national well-being and the building pressures on most institutions in a global economy.

Change comes in so many forms. After graduate school at Teachers College Columbia, I was drawn to work for colleges like Antioch, Goddard, Vermont College (then of Norwich University), and The New School where progressive change is a powerful motive (but often in competition with college finances when, in one case, the student demand was to fund a daycare program). All of these turned out to be difficult institutions to manage and I took administrative duties to protect them and, sometimes, to save my job.

Beyond self studies, I know how difficult it is to affect change like the sale of a satellite campus by Norwich University to reduce overhead, or my own administration's unsuccessful effort to turn around a nasty counter-culture in the residential program when I was president of Goddard College in the early 90s (that troubled program was closed by the third president after me). Before that, I was a newly promoted vice president for academic affairs at Antioch in Yellow Springs, hired by President Alan Guskin who was new to Antioch. One of my first assignments was to plan the closing of Antioch's troubled public interest Law School in Washington, DC. Talk about planned change! The Antioch leaders of that era also tried, in vain, to alter the sad, slow spiral down of the College. (The College has reopened and seems revitalized.) Finally, Alan asked me to plan a new college on the Yellow Springs campus for adult and graduate programs, which today is known as Antioch University Midwest.

Perhaps the best work of my career was as Deputy Provost for The New School, where I led the 2003 decennial self-study. My team had the full support of President Bob Kerrey and Provost Elizabeth Dickey. The self-study led to changes like a new faculty senate, improved collaboration among the seven colleges, and increased integration of undergraduate studies and improved General Education. We set major changes going, but what I'm most proud of was the way we slowly built improved communication across many independent colleges and between faculty and senior administration.

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Finally, for the past few years I have been privileged to serve as a Commissioner at Middle States. Here I've been exposed to the great diversity of schools and colleges as well as the even greater variance in effectiveness and quality. Perhaps most administrators like me climb a steep, shaky ladder inside one tall silo from which we cannot see the problems and potential of organizations that have much different missions and capacities. The Commission, of necessity, focuses on struggling institutions, large and small, and tries to help them change themselves. That is, much of the staff work in the Emergency Room.[6] Of course, my opinions are not those of the Commission.

What are best practices for leading and evaluating college renewal seen as a *dynamic process* of many moving pieces? CHE Standards of Excellence 2 and 7 focus on planning and assessment of institutional effectiveness, respectively. Really, all the standards involve change management. My lens will be the *dynamics of planned change and its assumptions* rather than a static look at individual standards, or the content we look for to let us judge compliance.

This Commission, like most of the regional associations, organizes its work around a set of standards. Increasingly, pressure from the government and other publics is forcing teams more toward compliance than institution building. What can be lost is one insight I want to emphasize, hardly original, but no less valuable:

> *Self-study process is more important than its content!* How campus teams go about self study and planned change—the *process variables*—are more important than specific goals, or even the depth of the change.

Do you remember that sixties word, "change agent?" What is a department chair, dean, provost, or president—the people in this room or reading my paper—If not a hardy soul deeply interested in organizational change? Why would anyone take a job so circumscribed by what a mentor of mine, Leo Srole, once derided as the three P's--"people, paper and power"—if it were not for the possibility of progress? (For those counting, we have two more "p's.")

I say "possibility of progress" because serious, deep change that endures is difficult to organize, much less sustain—indeed, contemporary scholars of organizational change like John Kotter, Adrianna Kezar, and W. Warner Burke open with just this caveat.[7] Some transformations work, but too often the results, Kotter observes for businesses he studied, are "lukewarm," which is his word. Many efforts at transformative change fail, he asserts, notwithstanding enormous investments of energy, time and money. Most organizational change is evolutionary according to Burke.

Case for Change in Higher Education

A recent national opinion poll by Northeastern University on the direction higher education is heading found that Americans, while proud of their colleges and universities, have serious questions about needed innovation and high cost.[8] Critics from the left and right opine saying that "transformative" or "big-impact" change is needed.[9] Higher education faces slew of problems as well as realistic, if not cynical, worries about whether higher education can reform itself. Let's not exaggerate, but acknowledge serious challenges, especially because observers like Burke and Zemsky assert that the external environment is changing faster than our internal capacity to respond. My reader has heard the concerns:

- Whether or not we can control increasing cost that results in high student and family debt
- Uneven completion rates and diminishing access
- Reduced state and federal support
- Endlessly new information technology in online learning that is disruptive
- New worries about return on investment
- For all these reasons, weakening support by political leaders and the voting public

Let's look briefly at the challenges of one sector and hear from Professor Zemsky. The threat list varies somewhat by sector even as some issues are shared like unsustainable finances, uneven learning outcomes, and unsteady governance. Zemsky likes to provoke, of course, and at MSCHE in 2008 and UVM in 2012 he predicted bad weather ahead.

At UVM in November, 2012, he worried aloud about struggling public research universities where he left his audience with a vivid image, saying that public research institutions today find themselves "Between a New Rock and Bad Hard Place: Public Research Universities at Risk." Saying this sector was in the worst shape he had seen in twenty years, the old "bad hard space" has three threats, if my notes are right:

1. Governing boards are not performing and large universities appear ungovernable
2. Turnover in college leaders is too high, reflecting the stress *and* causing more of it
3. Big-time sport like football at Penn State is too dominant in campus culture and decisions (and let's add the disproportionate power of a professional school in law or medicine that has a close ally in its professional association and strictures)

His "bad hard space" also features: weak General Education requirements, wasteful departmental competition for course time and visibility in the curriculum, and too little communication among faculty about what they teach and why. Shared governance becomes, he says, a "smokescreen for lack of shared responsibility."

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The "new rock," Zemsky says, is formed by major shifts in higher education, largely external as well as off shore, responding to global economic challenges:

- Seventy per cent of higher education will focus on narrow-cast, technology-close, vocational preparation in community colleges using standardized curricula, an approach one might emulate from successes in Germany or Switzerland.
- Universities need to control costs better and get unit cost down.
- To his list, let's add that the "big box for profits," my term, that aggressively compete for scholarship dollars and online students.
- America has too many research institutions for all to survive.[10]

Two caveats are needed. Before we consider change dynamics, ponder this: Freeman Dyson asserts that colleges and universities (and religions) are the most durable human institutions.[11] The universities of Oxford and Paris have existed for more than eight hundred years. The University of Bologna is the oldest, founded in 1088; Oxford and University of Paris, a hundred or so years later.[12] We might surmise that their enduring values and contributions to the state have let them survive and that also meant *resisting changes* that might have proved fatal, we have to guess. And some small places are just hard to kill. One wag at a struggling place called his college, with some affection, the "cockroach of higher education" because of its stubborn survival.

Planned Change Needs a *Theory* of Change

In 2008 at the annual CHE conference we heard a stimulating talk about planned change by Robert Zemsky. Education systems, he said, have this plastic quality—they absorb energy, then return to original shape. Zemsky gave us the image: education systems resist change like a sponge returning to its box shape just as soon as we stop leaning on it or poking it. Too often, Zemsky would say, we see piecemeal attempts followed by massive regression to the mean, which, in effect, neutralizes the threat to the status quo.

Zemsky added that it is unproductive "to vilify" those whose cooperation you need. Attempts to change higher education fail because we can't enlist the genuine cooperation of the faculty if we criticize their motives and work, often without really knowing much about that work.

Zemsky added that system change needs evidence. We can't expect people to take the critic's or steering committee's word for the need for change without serious evidence in the form of studies, program evaluations and the like. Faculty members in higher education respond to change proposals by saying, "What is your evidence for the problem you see?"

Then Zemsky spoke to the need to have a *theory of change*, especially when it comes to change-resistant social systems. I was inspired by his ideas, which rumbled around for years in my mind, moving toward this paper. His suggestion backed into an interest I have long had in psychology, so called naïve or implicit theories of personality or personal change.

Change projects, large or small, have an *implicit* theory, but it is not *explicit*, well developed, or always clearly stated. The spirit of his thinking is to ask for: a *coherent strategy of transformation with some evidence* as opposed to mere rhetorical assertions about what an endangered college like Black Mountain, or a department of classical studies, or profession like pastoral education, surely "needs."

Adrianna Kezar gives us a working definition of theory of change: "a predictive assumption about the relationship between desired changes and the actions that may produce those changes - If I do x, then I expect y to occur, and for these reasons."[13] Theories of change, whether explicitly stated or implicitly embedded, underpin policies and programs that seek to change organizations and social systems. Finally, Kezar adds that theories of change in the social sciences depend upon context as to "the circumstances, type of change, and institutional culture and environment and requires creative leadership and not formulaic approaches."

Zemsky's meaning of "theory of change" applied to self study would ask the change agent to think about the whole range of outcomes wanted, concrete goals and timelines, all the forces pro and con, and the evidence that tells us we are being successful.

Colleges *are* Different

We can get ideas and methods from studying organizational change outside higher education. We'll look to this literature for its insights. At the same time, Kezar says that higher education is a special type of organization defined by:

- A value-driven academic culture where the words we use matter
- Distributed leadership structure
- Ideal of shared governance however imperfect
- Low turnover of core stakeholders like faculty
- Different constituencies have disparate goals not easily yoked together

Colleges are "loosely coupled organizations," less responsive to command and control authority (this is Weick's concept that is used by Burke and Kezar). Kezar says that change strategies that recognize this type of organizational culture are more likely to be effective.[14]

While for-profits like Apple or Microsoft create a distinctive organizational culture, colleges and universities (as well as religions) connect people to the larger organization using myriad customs and rituals that are intended to make strong connections. High-minded values attract persons to teaching and service, and sometimes faculty members accept lower compensation because they want the odd mix of teaching, research, and personal freedom. Many staff and faculty stay with a college for long periods, Kezar suggests, which also increases identification.

Idealistic values, flexible work, long employment, and a touch of dissonance reduction for all the personal sacrifice—all combine to lead long-term staff and faculty to deep emotional attachment. The challenge comes when we ask people who truly love their college to consider dramatic changes. We'll return to this idea shortly.

That is, we can easily underestimate the way the "old idea" like the virtues of the semester system is embedded in a thick culture of living beings and the many variables that hold the system (or culture) in a certain Lewinian *force field* as well as underestimate the requirements for change, say, from a semester to a quarter system.

Leadership and culture are closely connected in Edgar Schein's work over many years as a professor at MIT. Leadership can involve creation of a new culture where the existing culture "implies stability and rigidity in the sense that how we are supposed to perceive, feel, and act…."[15] Social behavior is predictable and governed by values and norms, expressed in customs and rituals, which help people interact and find meaning in those interactions (what Weick calls "sensemaking"). His point is that organizational cultural and leadership are closely connected, especially when a new leader tries to change the culture.

Some small colleges are agile in response to threat if they have bold leaders. In the l970s, Alverno College, a small catholic women's college, moved toward innovative adult degree programs for both sexes. Scores of other colleges followed suit and this survival strategy is by now well known. This adaptation occurred well before the big-box for-profits like the University of Phoenix entered adult education as a market.

Schein's thinking raises another dynamic tension. An organizational culture must be strong enough to cope with external threat but not so strong with such high boundaries as to resist new ideas and change. All organizations live in a competitive environment, one that has new global challenges and threats of "disruptive technology."[16]

How does Schein resolve the dilemma of when strong becomes rigid? In his latest thinking, he suggests a Sengean "learning culture" led by a "learning leader."[17] The notion is that all parties need to be continuously learning and adapting while staying close to clear, core values. The goal is to build a culture around values but one that is nimble in how in builds outward from those commitments. I can think of one organization I worked where a dynamic leader increasingly took an organization he built away from its core commitments in healthcare chaplaincy toward ever-grander projects that are not sustainable, putting the whole at risk.

Any social group that has a shared history and exists for a time creates a culture, which may be something that we have evolved to do. Group norms evolve including boundaries with other groups. Cultural ties carried in language and customs are usually unseen but no less powerful in guiding behavior. "Co-op" and "experiential learning" are important concepts at Antioch and "work program" is powerful code at Sterling College in Vermont and other work colleges.[18] Burke says culture is "the way we do things around here."[19] Schein suggests that norms are powerful because they operate outside consciousness.[20] We learn about cultural taboos when a norm is broken and the result can be emotionally intense, even violent in some societies.

Finally, in Burke's careful comparison of different models of organizational structure and change, which is grounded in his extensive consulting experience, he emphasized the importance of organizational culture. One theory by Noel Tichy from the University of Michigan was highlighted because of the centrality given to culture, both for understanding how organizations work as well as for changing culture.[21] Tichy's model features the integration of three systems: technical, political, and cultural. *Technical* is based on science and technology and is highly rationalized. The *political* is based on conflict and politics where some people and groups have more power than others. The *cultural* has shared values and norms and the mental mindsets that link people together. The three systems of the TPC model, Tichy says, are braided like a rope and effective change requires changing norms and perhaps new values. All three have to be integrated to permit effective change. At the same time, abstract models of change or organization do not lead to pragmatic choices as to how to manage self study. To return to Lewin's quote, organization theory is not always practical.

Types of Resistance to Change

Where does resistance to change come from? The word "resistance" is often paired with "change" as in "resistance to change." Before we discuss types and sources, the term "resistance" needs attention because it sounds pejorative. Resistance sounds bad, change sounds good—which is too much of a dualism. Rather, let's explore resistance to change as an inevitable part of the nature of both human beings and our cultural systems, large and small. Resistance is connected, however loosely or imperfectly, with wanting to continue the status

quo, or perhaps wanting to survive. To justify major change, after all, one has to argue that without it, the whole is threatened. If the college, for instance, doesn't create a weekend college, it will go out of business in two years….

Sometimes, change agents use resistance rather loosely as a *psychological* category, a psychic defense mechanism by which difficult ideas or conflicts are avoided, mostly not in our awareness.[22] Other meanings are *political*, meaning organized, mostly conscious, resistance to change, or *cultural* such as an ancient tribe resisting new ideas about raising chickens, or a liberal arts faculty resisting an online degree. In the case of cultural resistance, the sources are unconscious *and* conscious and Burke, for one, suggests not going at culture directly but rather focusing on behavior change, letting ethos slowly catch up.

Resistance can be both institutional in the sense that the critic is, in effect, criticizing the entire leadership of the trustees, or all the admissions staff. Institutional resistance may come from staff or faculty unions that want to protect their own interests as they see them. Then the whole group rises up to defend its interests!

Kezar gives us another, quite simple, type of resistance that was new to me: sometimes it just means *not understanding*—people just do not understand what is being proposed or why it is necessary, which made me think of a Total Quality Management (TQM) initiative at Norwich University that never really took hold, notwithstanding months of training time. Not understanding is not quite the same thing as unconscious resistance although that might be involved.

Kezar suggests that planned change needs clear language about vision and goals. Her explanation of this type connects to other theories we'll consider shortly, namely, that humans are interpreting beings. Our understanding of the life world is based on the meanings we've learned. That is why *sensemaking*, she says, has to be at the center of planned change. Self-study participants need many opportunities to sit with new concepts, to try on the new terms, and so on.

Consider a complex example that includes many forms of resistance to change. To administrators of my era circa 2000 at The New School in New York City, the most powerful college-subculture was the Graduate Faculty. When I was organizing a decennial self-study, we saw all three forms of resistance to outcomes assessment, centralized planning to tighten the university, and any talk about reducing the substantial subsidy they got thanks to considerable sacrifices by two other faculties who had to cover many more classes and advisees. Some conflicted topics in any institution are impossible to discuss openly. Still, I valued the intellectual values and historical legacy of the Graduate Faculty and I respected their distrust of central authority. But we tried to find ways to include their voice in, say, the run up to a Faculty

Senate, which proved a controversial recommendation that got me in trouble with other administrators.

Resistance was also evident in the fact that several of my senior colleagues in the administration were angry with me when, with the president's consent, we appointed up-and-coming faculty members to chair various committees, including finance. We wanted to signal to the community that senior leaders value the voices, even the criticism, of the faculty because their opinions had not been valued by the prior administration. Progress was made with faculty governance issues and academic policies, but we backed away from the most painful dilemmas like internal subsidies by college or program.

Planned change is neither value free nor without conflict. Doing a self-study may sound like a value-free technology for everyone's benefit when, in fact, competing values and interests are omnipresent.[23] A self-study says "yes" to some ideas for change, but many more "no's" although how this is done is not usually transparent. In my experience, the self-study coordinator has to integrate competing goals and purposes, which means managing conflict. Planning to invest in a new college means less money for an existing one or, more subtly, a change in program B might have to wait on change in program A. The argument, in effect, comes over the language that survives initial drafts when one college or department, for instance, is passionate about a new MFA degree that is not, however, supported by other colleges or senior officers. The parsing of words as to timing or priority can be vexing. The last self-study I organized involved long, difficult discussions about whose changes could be funded in what order.

W*hose values* are being implemented? At what cost? Who wins and who loses?

How well do our self-studies reflect the voices of dissidents or the staff or disgruntled students and alumni/ae? How valid or balanced can a self-study be in an institution rife with administrative-faculty conflict, or where there is sharp conflict over healthcare benefits with a faculty or staff union? More subtly, we might ask if the domain assumptions of a neutral-appearing change profession like organization development are too managerial and hierarchic without being transparent.[24]

Resistance and change are inseparable. How do we advance candid critiques in academe without engendering unnecessary defensiveness? Better said, how do we manage the understandable and inevitable resistance? Change means criticism, but how it is delivered makes all the difference. Passionate calls for change can be heard differently by long-term stakeholders, variously, that ideas that you fought for fifteen years ago are "outdated," that your program is "out of steam," not said, that you are "getting old." No wonder we encounter

emotional resistance to our call for Change! –and this means being careful about change words as well as the enthusiasm we evince.

So, for anyone planning change in a college, please assume that some values and many attitudes are not as widely shared as leaders imagine. The wise self-study coordinator, in my opinion, tries to fashion a working consensus on the most central dilemmas the college faces, setting aside certain fights for another day.

What to Do: Two Alternatives

Colleges are unique organizational cultures and most observers say change is needed. One need not agree on every criticism of higher education to suggest that improvements are needed in many sectors, certainly cost containment and access. What should a college do? Alan Guskin and Mary Marcy frame the alternatives as choosing to "muddle through" or to restructure to reduce cost while also increasing quality of teaching and learning.[25]

Muddling through means piecemeal changes that serve to protect the status quo and slowly erode quality because structural costs have not been challenged. Little money is available for faculty development or innovation by which to invest in improved student learning. As problematic, the quality of work and life for faculty also wanes as they are asked to do more with much, much less. I think we see just this pattern in besieged state systems. I'm adding some of my own energy to their analysis, but it is not hard to see Guskin and Mary's point.

The alternative is not cough syrup but surgery: to use zero-based budgeting, painful and intrusive as it is, to challenge structural costs while also freeing up funds for innovation by which to improve student learning and faculty work life. Part of their solution is to use information technology to stimulate and document learned regardless of place or time. Another suggestion is to challenge how the support staff is organized in support of learning, thus trying to improve efficiency and reduce cost.

Changing Assumptions about Real People in Flesh-and-Blood Colleges

Planned change is much messier than the flow chart that illustrates the model we favor. Let's think about the imperfect people and institutions we want to change rather than stay too comfortable with abstract models of change. After all, critical to the validity of any theory of change are two sets of assumptions: those we make about the nature of human beings as well as about human organizations. Those assumptions are changing.

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Assumptions about human beings. What assumptions will we change agents make about the real people whose attitudes and behavior we would change? Other things being equal, current theory and research suggest several insights and a few provocations that, social psychologists claim, are counter-intuitive. My objective is not a complete survey, but we'll find enough to suggest that we change agents should not feel too comfortable with a rationalist, cognitive and top down approach.

Most of the ideas we consider are well established in social psychology and I don't provide full citations.[26] I will ask us to consider subtle points about how people might *think* about planned change as well as how they can *feel,* thus acknowledging unconscious, emotional factors. For convenience, we'll state the changing assumptions in terms of how we might think about self study and planned change.

- Self study should structure and reward active meaning making, what Anna Neumann calls "mindwork."[27] Humans are pattern-seeking, meaning-making beings who try to make sense of their environs and do so endlessly, but not always accurately. Administrative sciences have become interested in cognitive social psychology, which has more than fifty years of research on attitude change. Neumann writes about the "cognitive turn" toward the end of the last century when organization theory began to take notice of how people affected by change *think* about change as well as their participation.[28]
- People prefer to be involved in the decisions that affect their lives.[29]
- To change attitudes in conjunction with self-study, don't attack frontally. Rather, try to *change behavior first* and let the mind then justify the investment of time and energy (cognitive rationalization, mostly unconscious).
- Self study might think about the *demand environs* we create for all actors because this is where attitude change begins and plays itself out. To change behavior and attitudes, change the demand environs people have to make sense of, especially change the *peer group* that influences expectations and attributions at all stages of life.[30]
- Self study should expect hard work and praise the sacrifices people make. If people work hard on a task, they tend to justify the expenditure, the calories really, by *valuing* the activity even if, especially if, they didn't enjoy it at the time (dissonance reduction).[31]
- Self study should use small groups with effective facilitation. People are more easily motivated and learn better in small groups where they have opportunities to rehearse new vocabulary, challenge mindsets, and for sensemaking, in general.
- Self study should frame its evaluations and feedback in positive more than negative terms (a ratio of 8 to 2?). Drawing on positive psychology, Kim Cameron suggests an

"affirmative bias in change efforts" where strengths and resilience are praised.[32] Negative feedback is appropriate and can be powerful, but should be used sparingly to avoid too much resistance.

- Planned change needs rational arguments, but also active attention to emotional and unconscious feelings. Emotional preferences pro and con, usually not in awareness, are more potent in decisions than rational thought, which plays a justifying role. When making decisions, Jonathan Haidt says people overestimate rational thinking and underestimate unconscious and emotional elements.[33] Using a Buddhist image of a driver on top his elephant, the driver believes he directs the beast when, in truth, it goes where it wants, leaving the driver to rationalize why that was the best path. Haidt says the driver is less a president than an advisor.

Similarly, psychologist Daniel Kahneman has received wide notice for his work on two ways of thinking: System 1, which is "fast, automatic, frequent, emotional, stereotypic, subconscious" and System 2 which is "slow, effortful, infrequent, logical, calculating, conscious."[34] Both define what it means to be all too human.

Assumptions about organizations. Both Burke and Kezar argue that the dominant metaphor of the latter half of the last century for understanding organizations and organizational change was the open systems model borrowed from the life sciences. Under this framework, we tried to understand transactions of energy and information between the organization and its environment, often using systems language of inputs, throughputs, and outputs. In contrast, Warner Burke observes that organizational theorists of the last twenty years or so appear to be absorbing concepts from other disciplines to capture nonlinear events like chaos theory from mathematics, Stephen Jay Gould's notion of punctuated equilibrium from anthropology, deep ecology and living systems from Fritjof Capra, and Malcom Gladwell's influential thinking about tipping point and counter-intuitive change in organizations (major gain from small events). To Burke's list we can add attention to Neumann's "mindwork" that people do in organizations undergoing change. Finally, I find it provocative to be asked to think what the difference is among change events over a specific time frame and the great flux of ordinary organizational life. This challenging mindset suggests that change may not be as easily differentiated as we imagine it to be, or as easily manipulated by change agents.

In sum, organizations are still understood as set in specific environments, but more attention is now going to a nonlinear, multiplicative calculus with attention to complicated interactions among key variables. Some attention also has been going to organizations as learning systems in the work of Argyris, Senge, and Watkins and Marsick. In general, we want our thinking about organizations and change to be complex and subtle, with increased appreciation for ambiguity and backsliding, mystery and paradox.

Ten Critical Process Variables

We have set the context for looking at how leaders manage process in a college self-study or other forms of planned change in a college. Now let's look at change dynamics from a different angle, what the poet Emily Dickinson may have meant by looking at something sideways or slant, saying: "Tell all the truth, but tell it slant."[35]

Imagine *ten critical process variables*, each to be actively monitored for most of the self-study period summarized in Table 1. Each sentence begins with a "how" because we need a process over time, one that is *explicit* and can be *monitored*. If a process can be monitored, even measured, we can improve performance. That is, most are not "one and done" items found on a self-study check list (as in "involve faculty…check!").

Anyone who has ever been close to a self-study or other planned change knows, of course, to involve the staff and faculty. Beyond a putative good, however, not much more is added. When? How? For how long? That can mean that good intentions get lost as the self-study builds momentum to its frantic apex. Rather, let's imagine a "method" for each process variable because each has several moving pieces that need definition and regular attention.[36] Finally, I will argue that the self-study or major change that monitors and corrects the variables will be, others things equal, more effective.

1. *How is the case for change and its evidence assembled?*
    Before the bold new vision is announced, what is the argument for change and what forms of evidence are marshaled in support? For a loosely coupled academic culture, we need a process that respects core values and, indeed, seeks opinions and reactions from others. Perhaps a general problem is identified by the administration, followed by focus groups or survey feedback to gather opinion, leading to a community forum where the data and next steps are discussed.[37] Kezar observes that benchmarks or analysis with competitors can be persuasive. An inspired statement can stimulate vision building, but Burke makes the point that empirical evidence is appreciated by the faculty who feel respected by being consulted.[38]

2. *How is the new vision constructed?*
    Creating a vision for a department or the whole college is exciting, important work. College leaders, in consultation with the community, can suggest a bold vision and leave the tactical details to people charged with implementing the change. But who gets to play with the language, so important in the academy, and its implications? How is the criticism of "the old" developed and expressed so that defensiveness is managed? How is the "negation" expressed in the case for change so as to not vilify? Both the way we

frame change of "the old" and the active process we use to get buy in for "the new" are critical.

Here is one fear. Call it the "romance of the new." Perhaps we change agents fall too easily in love with—and exaggerate—the "new idea" like Total Quality Management, or service learning, or college-wide outcomes assessment, or making a college into a university, each change worthy in the right measure at the right time.

3. ***How is sensemaking given explicit, sustained focus?***

Kezar argues that resistance can be more a matter of not understanding than psychological defensiveness, and that cultural-level change requires many open conversations. As interpreting beings, people need time and opportunity to sit with the new terms and the implications of the change. As suggested earlier, interpreting beings need the rehearsal time so important for learning and sensemaking for the duration of the self-study. Organizing community feedback meetings toward the end is a good idea, but insufficient if leaders want active engagement.

Lastly, in self study we want lively engagement, not grumpy compliance. If the administration, especially the president, is too heavy-handed in its leadership, faculty and staff grow silent and withdraw. Saying this, I'm reminded of the sociologist Erving Goffman and his thinking about face and how people cope with authority, known today as the "suits." People learn various ways of avoiding confrontation with authorities. Those criticized listen to people in power and perhaps nod heads, but resent and eventually dismiss the criticism, especially if the critic is from outside the system and from another profession like social psychology.

4. ***How are campus staff, students and faculty involved?***

We know this to be a core value of self study, but how is it done? Let's view a self-study as a learning opportunity for everyone, especially newer generations to the college. Of course, we want a degree of proportional representation in committees and we want the best minds. To populate them, it may seem easier, if not politically expedient, to appoint the "usual suspects"—but a broader and deeper degree of inclusion is preferred even if it slows the work. The community, in fact, will watch how persons are chosen and special attention should go to including emerging leaders of the next generation of faculty or staff. In addition, consideration should be given to including dissidents (who are leaders, really) and the quiet opinion leaders, "tempered radicals," that Debra Meyerson studied for much of her career.

Finally, as a self-study builds momentum, ideal community engagement can be weakened either by people dropping out or, more subtly, by committee members not reporting back to their faculties or departments (which the steering committee tacitly assumes). We might worry less about one or two people "dropping the ball," and pay attention to training and method. Attention to concrete feedback via good minutes and seeing that the reporters have the awareness and skills to do this work is critical, which we pick up again in #6 below.

5. ***How are self-study leaders distributed vertically and horizontally?***

Planned change and self study are leadership development opportunities. Choosing chairs is a talent search for new energy more than for the ideas. This work attracted me to administration and I know of other examples where up-and-coming faculty members cut their teeth on a self-study, eventually becoming deans and then presidents. As committee chairs are chosen, select persons with respect to different levels (both department and college) as well as from the center to the periphery. Michael Beer and his colleagues in business argue that revitalization begins from the periphery, not the center, where local managers use *ad hoc* approaches for concrete needs. Managers guide, but do not dictate solutions.[39]

6. ***How are people leading self-study teams educated about managing change?***

How are members of the steering committee and subcommittees educated and then supported about managing change like running a meeting? Kezar observes that some faculty leaders are not, in fact, skilled in running meetings or building a work team. They may not know simple things like using an agenda, checking in with a group at the start and end of a meeting, getting minutes out right away. They may not be comfortable holding people accountable, especially peers.

Another skill is more political: a chair understanding how to use her role to build consensus in the group, which usually means finding tactful ways to say "no" or "later" to one idea or the other. The filtering and integrating of ideas is a central function of the committee chair.[40] If the chair is not effective, that committee's work and voice are easily lost.

7. ***How do self-study leaders communicate with people not close to the process?***

Only a small portion of any college can be involved in self study. By what means and when will issues and recommendations be communicated to trustees, alumni/ae, students and staff? At The New School toward the end of our decennial, we created a poster session where committee findings were put on easels around a large room. It was an open meeting and refreshments were served. We asked participants to circulate

and talk among themselves, taking questions and feeding reactions to the steering committee. The event went well, but, in retrospect, it was too isolated and too late to stimulate the engagement we sought.

8. ***How is formative evaluation used to improve the process?***
A decennial self-study or major change effort have so many pieces that coordination and communication are absolutely essential. One curious aspect of a self-study, in my experience, is that change agents usually do not evaluate the evaluation as it is progressing, except by happenstance. Formative evaluation of various study committees is essential, especially if the meetings are run by persons lacking skills. The steering committee that meets frequently can be used to "check in" on process in the subcommittees so that people feel there is an open channel for discussing problems with either content or process.

One last point: it can be challenging with all the busywork of self study to stay in touch with the various committees because, for one thing, some will struggle more than others. The coordinator has to make sure that the several "change" pieces come forward at the right level of detail at about the same time, which is no small order. It is not unlike orchestrating a complex meal for picky eaters—the right ingredients have to be artfully combined at just the right time.

9. ***How are evaluation outcomes used to feed the next cycle of self study and change?***
Let's think about the periodicity of reflection and planned change in colleges and worry about the discontinuous nature of change. We might guess that the data and recommendations of self-studies, whether a decennial or Periodic Review Report, wither on the vine once the accrediting team has left, only to have to be rebuilt five or so years later by new persons.

10. ***How is change momentum built and sustained?*** This last process variable is subtle and one easily missed when, for instance, a self-study is started two soon or, more often, too late for serious impact. Perhaps 10% of the self- studies we hear about in Commission staff reviews are "hasty puddings" begun too late, usually, in fairness, because the administration is distracted with other problems. Self- study in a university or a major culture change can be intense and we want to pay attention to *tempo*—just the right intensity at the right time! The intensity of self study as a continuous dynamic can't be maintained, of course. At the same time, I would argue that change momentum gets wasted. It may sound cynical but many recommendations get lost until just before the PRR is due five years later and then, items lack consensus, or seem out of

date. That leaves too much time with major changes only occurring around the spikes of administrative attention.

Imagine a hypothetical wave function whereby reflection and planned change vary, punctuated by, first, an intense two years leading to the decennial review and, second, at the midpoint of ten years, one year of much less intense work leading to the midterm review. (Many institutions, of course, also have different cycles at the school or discipline in conjunction with professional associations like ABA.) Figure 1 shows two hypothetical functions—one that suggests spikes of intensity followed by relative inactivity and the second shows lower peaks of intensity with more-or-less continuous improvement. A good case can be made for either pattern, but thinking about the interval and flow among change efforts over time is useful for institutional renewal and vitality.

Suggestions for Better Practice and New Theory

This review has covered many topics in search of better ideas to improve change management. What has changed in the theory and practice of planned change from the literature of the l960s and 70s? Both theory building and practice seem better informed about the complexity of change, especially when local culture is pushed too hard, too fast. Organizations may be open systems and can be described hierarchically with a Table of Organization, but that is not how loosely coupled systems and their distributed work teams behave—or change. We have to expect nonlinear effects where a simple causal logic, if A then B, produces unanticipated consequences, some that are also iatrogenic.

Right now is a great time for new theory building and for improved practice. First, the open systems paradigm has been challenged by new nonlinear models. At the same time, the new thinking I've read doesn't lead to concrete advice about making change other than, well, expect surprises and pay attention to the people. Perhaps that is too strong, but one informed observer, Warner Burke, says that no good organizational theory now exists.[41] As if to respond, Michael Bastedo argues for new research on "the work" of higher education in addition to "field dynamics around resources and norms."[42] The nature of the work in education is, he asserts, more important than environmental demands in an open systems construct. He worries about a "retreat from practice," saying that little thinking lately has gone to administrative practices, or the nature of student and faculty learning.

In that regard, thinking about colleges and universities as learning organizations makes perfect sense because this vocabulary is much closer to mission than the performance language of TQM and other business models that appear mechanistic and reductionist, at least to people in the humanities. Bastedo has observed that colleges have become more like businesses and

vice versa. Still, the distinctive element of a college's mission is the primacy of learning, which sets our sector apart from other types of businesses even if they value learning.

New thinking might try to integrate the rational and the emotional, conscious and conscious elements in people affected by change, and bold vision and broad inclusion in how we organize change. The smart change strategy, we have argued, understands and appeals to people's emotions, their ability and desire to learn and to make sense of things, and to involve them personally in change as much as possible. More attention to process variables—particularly how to manage momentum—might lead colleges toward continuous improvement more than "spikey change" in response to accreditation reports and calendar.

Such concerns can be found in accreditation standards, if not in these terms. I have a larger concern, having read scores of self studies and written a few. A certain mechanistic quality infects our narratives, which can be tedious and uninspiring to read. Perhaps certainty is a safer course than puzzlement, dilemmas and ambiguity. Perhaps the current focus on assessment and outcomes contributes to emphasizing Alfred North Whitehead's precision motive and to data-based arguments.[43] Better, in my opinion, that our thinking about organizations and change is as nuanced as the people inside, with increased appreciation for ambiguity and backsliding, mystery and paradox.

That is not to look for metaphysical explanation the way chaos theory can be misused, but to value complexity. Perhaps a tradeoff exists between self-study content and process, between a sparkling vision and the mushy language of many vision and mission statements, which results from parsing and protracted consensus building. Burke calls attention to another paradox of change, how to find the right balance of affirmation and critique.

Our discussion of process variables highlights the resistance and conflict that can be so easily engendered. Some self-studies sound self-congratulatory as if the process has already worked to perfection, all conflict smoothed over. The vagaries of real change politics on a college campus might lead institutions to more circumspect language. Visiting teams should not then read honesty as weakness or lack of confidence, but see candor as strength and sophistication about how difficult real change in a college culture can be.

Effective change in self study requires that we train the leaders in *managing* change. Kezar's recommendation that *training in change skills* like running a good meeting be provided to participants is quite practical, in Lewin's terms. Faculty members may have refined skills in their discipline, but that doesn't mean they know how to run a meeting that has diverse university participation including staff and students. In this regard, recommendations that work their way through self study toward implementation (that survive the gauntlet!) depend on the skills of the advocates.

Zemsky and Kezar's request that we change agents articulate a *theory of change* is powerful because doing so will surface hidden or problematic assumptions. Kezar discussed six or more theories of change, each giving a slightly different purchase on change, which the phenomenon surely warrants. Early on, I took one of her ideas and tried to compare a rationalist model to a social intuitive one in a four cell table, high and low, in order to tease out the differences, or better, the tradeoffs. (That, of course, would be only one possible comparison.) Suffice it to say that planned change needs both a rational plan with serious analyses and data, but it also needs to anticipate social, emotional and intuitive parts of the all-too-human beings whose lives will be affected.

Finally, who evaluates the evaluators and by what means? How do we know that self-studies lead to demonstrable improvement or progress, not just busy change? A summative evaluation *after* the team visit that collects data on perceptions of the self-study and leads to ongoing improvements would embody the spirit of CHE's Standard 7. I don't know if or how often such an evaluation—a meta evaluation of the self-study—has been done, but this idea seems worthy, especially in light of #9. After all, wouldn't the president, trustees, or senior leaders want to know how effective such a commitment of resources has been? Strategic plans are made stronger if they include a risk assessment of various budget scenarios. A good self-study might have a risk assessment section by which to acknowledge the possibility of adverse outcomes, especially given a changing global environment.

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Figure 1. Two Hypothetical Functions to Suggest Patterns of Intensity in Institutional Self-study over Ten Years.
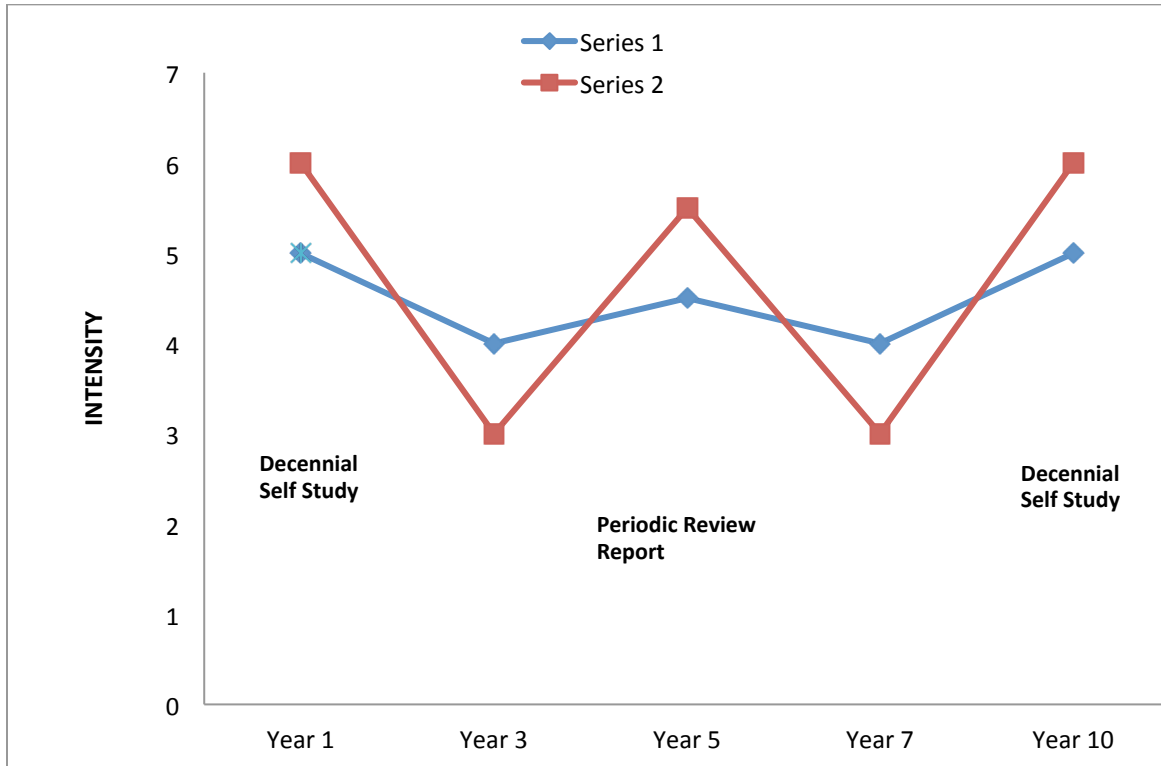
SERIES 1=LESS SPIKEY EVALUATION PROCESS

SERIES 2=TRADITIONAL SPIKED EVALUATION PROCESS

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Table 1. Ten Critical Process Variables in Self Study and Planned Change

1. How is the case for change and its evidence assembled?
2. How is the new vision constructed?
3. How is sensemaking given explicit, sustained focus?
4. How are campus staff, students and faculty involved?
5. How are self-study leaders distributed vertically and horizontally?
6. How are people leading self-study teams educated about managing change?
7. How do self-study leaders communicate with people not close to the process?
8. How is formative evaluation used to improve process?
9. How are evaluation outcomes used to feed the next cycle of self study and change?
10. How is change momentum built and sustained?

Endnotes

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[1] The classic volume for his work is: Kurt Lewin. *Field Theory in Social Science; Selected Theoretical Papers.* D. Cartwright, ed. New York: Harper & Row, 1951.

[2] Zemsky,"Making Sense of Higher Education Reform." Presentation to MSCHE Annual Meeting, December 7-9, 2008.

[3] Kezar, "Synthesis of Scholarship on Change in Higher Education." Also, Robert Zemsky in 2008 said that *system* change needs a *dislodging event*. Piecemeal reforms are doomed because of all the forms of institutional resistance. For higher education, he speculates that a call to reduce the 4 year college curriculum to 3 years would drive needed change because it would challenge so many assumptions. Another destabilizing event would be to have a prestigious panel assert that too many people in college are not prepared for college-level work and just should not be there. Where *should* they be? What would that mean for the economy? And so on.

[4] Meier, *The Power of Their Ideas, 113*.

[5] What I didn't appreciate at the time that I was a student of two of Kurt Lewin's students at MIT: Morton Deutsch and the late Stanley Schachter. The careers of both men reflected, in part, a tension felt by Lewin's students, called the "Bethel split" where Deutsch and others focused more on change and organizational and group dynamics whereas Schachter and his colleagues were uncomfortable with change and focused on laboratory research.

[6] One less noted consequence of this fact, in my opinion, is that we neglect a large silent sector of our 512 colleges where good institutions could be expected to do more.

[7] I'm grateful to W. Warner Burke and Adrianna Kezar whose decades of work on planned change oriented me to contemporary sources and new theory in planned change. Both compare and contrast different theories of change and Kezar is most useful for direct application to higher education.

[8] Mogilyanskaya, "Americans are Proud of U.S. Colleges but Not of Their Direction."

[9] The inflated rhetoric of planned change is curious. The need for adjectives like "transformative" or "big-impact" to drive a sentence suggest the basic problem, first, of defining exactly what change means, and, second, distinguishing temporary tactical change from enduring *progress* based on core values.

[10] Zemsky's remedy? Given such serious structural challenges, his suggestions at the time didn't sound convincing, but here they are: greatly "improved communication" up and down and sideways, a "culture of curiosity," and a "feline, inquisitive mind."

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[11] Dyson, "What Can You Really Know."

[12] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_oldest_universities_in_continuous_operation

[13] Kezar, "Synthesis of Scholarship on Change in Higher Education." Both quotations found in her footnote 2. She extended her argument to include implicit theories of change that underlie all choices of action in everyday life.

[14] Kezar, "Synthesis of Scholarship on Change in Higher Education," 10-11.

[15] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 3.

[16] Clayton Christiansen's concept of disruption has a specific meaning, namely, that new lower cost technology that provides an okay, not great, product will be preferred by customers.

[17] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 365.

[18] Kytle, *To Want to Learn*, 2nd edition, 131. For more on work colleges, go to: www.workcolleges.org/

[19] Burke, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, 24.

[20] Schein, *Organizational Culture and Leadership*, 7.

[21] Tichy, 1983, cited by Burke 2011, pages 203-207.

[22] James O'Toole advances no less than 33 hypotheses for why organizations resist change, cited by Burke.

[23] Too late for inclusion in this draft was my late night realization that so much of change and self study revolves around our work with personalities, in my experience. This person is being difficult, that one ambitious, and so on.

[24] In 1977, I wrote about organization development, then a new field, saying it wrongly assumes fundamental *consensus* in the organization in contrast to a *conflict* model. I was thinking of the classic top down entry by an OD consultant in contrast to bottom up community organizing as a model.

[25] Guskin and Marcy, "Dealing with the Future Now: Principles for Creating a Vital Campus in a Climate of Restricted Resources."

[26] Most of the ideas are discussed at length in my book, *To Want to Learn*. 2nd edition.

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[27] Neumann, "Organizational Cognition in Higher Education," 304.

[28] Neumann, "Organizational Cognition in Higher Education," 309.

[29] Many have studied this topic by different names including Baumeister, and Deci and Ryan, not to mention those writing about progressive education from Dewey on.

[30] I emphasize both ideas in Kytle, *To Want to Learn*.

[31] Leon Festinger's powerful theory is often misstated as meaning ideas in conflict—the subtle cognitive process of dissonance reduction is not *conscious* conflict but largely unconscious.

[32] Cameron, "Paradox in Positive Organizational Change."

[33] Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis*, 15-17.

[34] Quotation from: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thinking,_Fast_and_Slow> Daniel Kahneman. *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. New York: Macmillan, 2011.

[35] *Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson,* edited by Thomas Johnson. Many editions available.

[36] Sullivan and Harper, *Hope is Not a Method.* Sullivan's small book about how the US Army radically changed the supply chain is worth reading. His main point is the book's title, which I didn't understand at first, namely, that one cannot just hope for change or involvement or victory—one has to be methodical.

[37] Mann's survey feedback method is useful for identifying issues in a college and for inclusion. When the results are fed back to the community for their reaction, it also serves as formative evaluation. I've used it several times for starting a change effort and the community appreciates being consulted.

[38] Burke, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, 27.

[39] Beer, Eisenstat, and Spector, *"Why Change Programs Don't Produce Change,"* 177.

[40] Tavistock theory suggests that unconscious group dynamics greatly complicate discussion and decision making. Go to: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/**Tavistock**_Institute

[41] Burke, *Organization Change: Theory and Practice*, 135.

[42] Bastedo, "Organizing Higher Education: *A Manifesto,*" 8.

[43] Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and Other Essays*. He contrasts precision to romance as motives in inquiry.