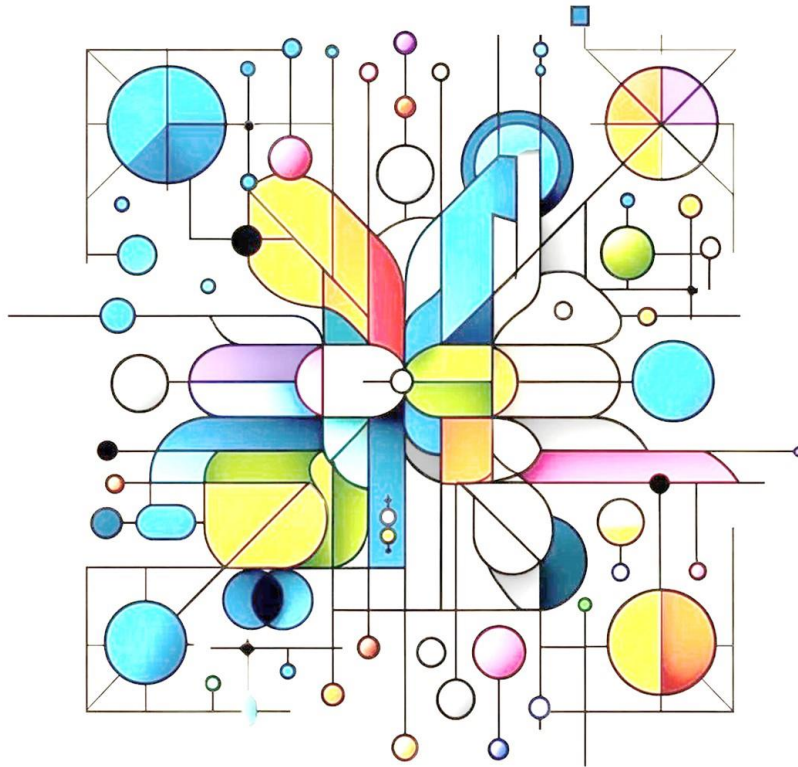


5 Change Model Classes

Why one change model alone is not going to get you there (wherever “there” is).



Extracted from Beyond Frameworks - Navigating the Ripple Effects of Change
Model Interactions, the *2024 edition*, by Patrick Verdonk

“Sometimes a change of
perspective is all it takes to
see the light.”

— Dan Brown

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A Tale of Change and Adaptation

Once upon a time, in the land of global telecommunications, there thrived a giant named Nokia. For years, Nokia reigned supreme, its name synonymous with innovation, reliability, and the iconic Nokia tune that echoed in pockets around the world. With a history stretching back over a century, Nokia had weathered many storms, transforming from a modest paper mill to a dominant force in the mobile phone industry. Its journey was marked by rapid growth, as it leveraged opportunities to diversify and expand, reaching the zenith of its power with a staggering 49.4% market share in 2007.

However, even giants can stumble. The introduction of the iPhone in 2007 marked the dawn of the smartphone era, a sea change Nokia was ill-prepared for. As the industry shifted towards software and ecosystems, Nokia, entrenched in its hardware dominance, found itself at a crossroads. The once clear path forward now seemed obscured by the rapid pace of technological evolution and changing consumer behaviors.

Despite its efforts to adapt, Nokia's market share began a precipitous decline, dropping to a mere 3% by 2013 when it sold its smartphone business to Microsoft. This period of turmoil was a stark reminder of the rigidity trap, a phase where continued success breeds complacency, and the warning signs of change are missed or ignored.

The sale marked the beginning of Nokia's release phase, a time of breakdown and uncertainty but also an opportunity for reinvention. Freed from the constraints of its past, Nokia embarked on a journey of reorganization, focusing on telecommunications infrastructure and services. This pivot was not just about changing strategies, but also about transforming its organizational culture, embracing innovation, and preparing for a future shaped by agility and adaptability.

As Nokia navigated through these tumultuous waters, the complexity of organizational change became evident. The story of Nokia is not just about the company itself but also about the broader dynamics of change in the modern business landscape. It underscores the importance of understanding different models of change—lifecycle, process, diagnostic, culture, and individual reaction models—and how they interact to shape the path of organizational transformation.

Nokia's tale is a vivid illustration of the complexity of change, with many aspects and perspectives converging to influence the outcome. It highlights the necessity for organizations to be agile, to continuously learn and adapt, and to understand that change is not a linear process but a multifaceted journey with many potential paths

and outcomes. As we delve deeper into the models of organizational change, let Nokia's story serve as a reminder of the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead in navigating the ever-evolving landscape of business transformation.

Introduction

Now that was just a story—based on true facts, but “dramatized” as they would say on Netflix. The purpose of starting with a story is to show that organizational change is complex.

Organizational change, whether it is your next [whatever] transformation, merger, or acquisition, can't be “managed” with a framework. There I said it.

Better said, there simply isn't one single framework that by itself can capture all the complexity that comes with an organization's environment, culture, people and their emotions, and so on. We need much more systemic approach to change. For those that do not believe this, I invite you to watch this 12-minute video by Russ Ackoff before continuing reading (he explains it much better than I can):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OqEelG8aPPk>

When I look back on almost 30 years of professional experience, I realize that my very first assignment in the mid-nineties was the start of a career in Change. At that time, I worked at Alcatel (yes, a competitor of Nokia in those days, then absorbed by Nokia in 2016). After nine months as a trainee, I was asked to set up a team that could translate contracts closed by sales into a “language” that operations understood and could deliver to the customer. The idea was that a few people from Sales and some others from Operations would form the team together. My task: make it work.

Imagine the context. I'm 25 years old. I'm met with people who weren't asked if they wanted to be part of the team, but simply got assigned to it—many of them having been with the company much longer than me. Mold that into an efficient team handling what was a huge bottleneck in the company at that time. I had never led a team, let alone set one up. I had no idea, no tools, no frameworks to start with. I only had my 3-month trainee experience in Sales, and another three months in Operations. Both experiences were conveniently not in the teams where my new team members had come from.

So, I sat the whole team down. First question: Who wants to be here? About two out of six hands went up. “This is going to be fun,” I thought. I told the team that I didn't expect them to stay. Instead, I asked them to help me set up the needed process, because

they were the experts. I promised them that I would help whomever wanted to leave when the flow proved to work move to another team they wanted to be in.

In less than three months, they collaboratively nailed down the process, and three months after that it proved efficient. During my team with this team, my work as their “manager” mainly consisted of enabling them to do their work. That meant keeping the pressure away from them, letting them train whatever skills they needed to do or improve on their job, observing them to understand their work, and “selling” upward that efficiency comes over time—not on day one.

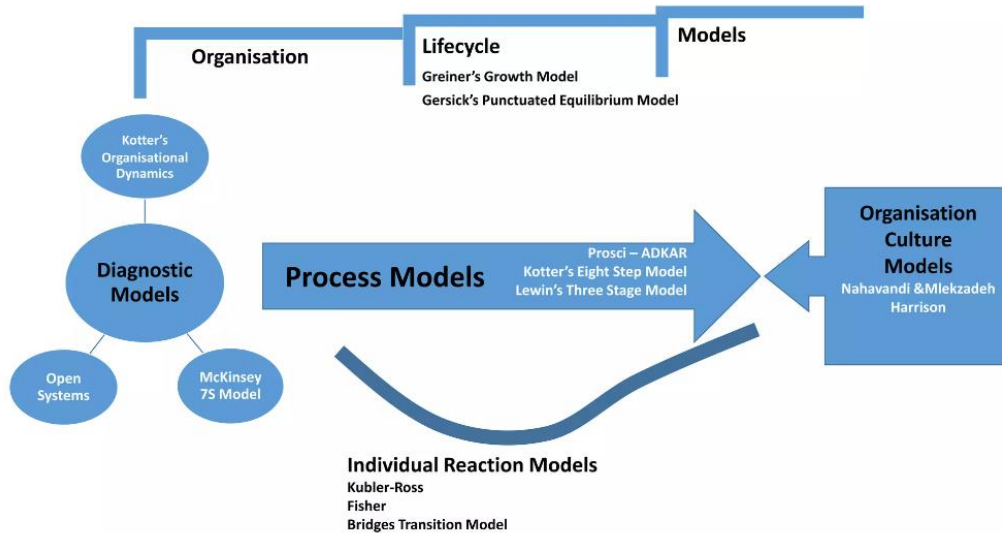
After six months, when I asked again who wanted to stay on the team, all but one hand was raised. I helped that one person to find a spot in another team where he felt he was better qualified.

Over time, I learned this hadn't been a “leadership” assignment, but a “change facilitation” role. The team, process, and its purpose were new: it was change. The people never worked together, each bringing their own team culture: another change. There were people that, for several reasons, didn't want to be there: yet another change. Which framework did I apply? None. I didn't know any. I didn't see it as change. I just acted based on common sense.

Over the past 25 years, in all kinds of change related roles, I learned that knowing one method, or another does not increase one's ability to facilitate change towards more success. Success in organizational change doesn't come from the battle between the PROSCI and Kotter models. One is not better than the other. They can each be useful in a specific context. Neither of them, on their own, is useful for complex organizational change. No change framework on its own is “complete” enough to grasp and facilitate all the complexity inherent in organizational change.

In more than two decades in the field, I've encountered a broad spectrum of organizational cultures, change initiatives, successes, and setbacks. These were experiences that taught me to look at change in context - *always*.

In late 2021, I stumbled upon a presentation by Andre Degreef called [Change Management Models in Context](#). It was dated July 13, 2016 (yes, five years old when I found it) and made something click in my mind: The key to organizational change is not the framework you use, but how you are able to work with the complexity of the interaction between the different categories of change models you need in organizational change.



With this realization, I began writing about the complexities of change, then stopped writing, then picked it up again writing some more, and once again stopped. Then, towards the end of 2023, I became very interested in the application of AI in my work. It revived my energy to pick up the writing where I'd left off, but with an added perspective.

Change management is a continually evolving field, and contributions from seasoned practitioners can significantly enrich its collective understanding and methodologies. By synthesizing our experiences with theoretical models, we can provide fresh perspectives, refine existing models, or even propose new ones, thereby advancing the discipline.

My attempt in this book is the exploration of the five categories of change models and their interactions as a basis for working in organizational change. The content is based on my own thinking and experience, which I then reviewed with the help of ChatGPT.

So let's get started.

5 Classes of Change Models

Navigating organizational change requires a map—our change models. Process, Lifecycle, Diagnostic, Culture, and Individual Reaction models provide the perspectives needed to effectively manage transformation.

- Lifecycle Models help in understanding the natural evolution and stages of change within an organization, addressing issues of timing and readiness for change.
- Diagnostic Models act as our compass, helping identify where change is needed, and addressing issues related to organizational inefficiencies or misalignment.
- Culture Models address issues related to organizational culture and its impact on change initiatives, helping align change efforts with cultural values and behaviors.
- Individual Reaction Models delve into the personal side of change, recognizing that everyone’s journey is unique, and addressing issues related to resistance, motivation, and engagement.
- Process Models provide a structured approach to implementing change, focusing on issues of planning, execution, and management of change initiatives.

Change isn’t a one-size-fits-all scenario. It’s messy, non-linear, and deeply human. Throughout this book, we will explore these models not just as isolated theories but as tools in a toolkit, encouraging a mix-and-match approach tailored to each unique change challenge.

Successful (organizational) change doesn’t come from mastering a single model but becoming fluent in the language of change, enabling us to craft strategies that resonate with the heartbeat of our organizations and the people within them.

Let’s continue with an introduction to each of the models. A more comprehensive what and how, will follow in later chapters, with emphasis on the maze of interactions these models create in combination.

Lifecycle and Evolution Models

Lifecycle Models illuminates the “Why” behind the need for transformation, guiding us to recognize and prepare for the next phase.

Lifecycle models focus on the overarching consideration of the strategic issues of growth and development; they set the scene in relation to understanding where an organization is at in its development and what drivers for change may exist at that stage.

These models describe why organizations need to change over time.



A shining example of ignoring the Lifecycle Model is the downfall of Nokia’s mobile phone business. Their management teams had been able to reinvent the business for decades, but lost connection with reality around 2010. They couldn’t grasp why a change was needed, and when they did, it was too late. For more on the Nokia examples, see this article: [Where did Nokia go wrong?](#)

Diagnostic Models

Diagnostic Models serve as our organizational detectives, pinpointing “What” needs change by assessing our organization’s health and identifying crucial adjustments.

Revealing current dysfunction or misalignment (or risks of future misalignment) within the enterprise and its environment will lead to the most appropriate change interventions.

These models help identify what to target for successful change.

We’ll discover through examples from McDonald’s and, again, Nokia how to use these models. The main idea is that if we target a change in a specific part of the company—say we change our strategy—we can diagnose the (potential) impacts on other areas of our business. If you can’t wait till the Diagnostic Model chapter, you can start reading this post: [The McKinsey 7-S Model Framework, Explained \(2024\)](#)

Culture Models

Culture, the organization’s soul, confronts another “What” of change, guiding us to reshape our collective behaviors and values.

These frameworks argue that “organizations are culture”, and that the consideration of aligning change strategies to the existing culture of the organization, and the culture of individual groups affected, is key to success.

These models describe what collective behaviors and values are involved in the change.

There are numerous examples of companies that have used culture as a way to turn around their business or become and remain sustainable enterprises. One of the more known cases is Southwest Airlines which, through a focus on culture, has defied gravity as a leading domestic airliner with consistent profitability, extreme customer loyalty, and a happy labor force. You can read some more on that here: [Southwest Airlines’ Nonstop Culture: Flying High with Transparency and Empowerment](#)



Individual Reaction Models

Process models tend to assume that recipients of change are rational in their responses. Spoiler: They are not.

However, communication and information in most transformation initiatives focus largely on cognitive processing and the explanation of the change process.

Central to these theories is the hypothesis that matching the organizational change journey and interventions to the requirements of individuals, and implementing appropriate support, will lead to more successful change outcomes.

These models describe what individual reactions to the change we may need to navigate.

Do a little self-check. Think back to a time where you got to decide on a change to make. How did that make you feel? Which emotions came up then? Which come up now that you think about it in hindsight? Hold that thought.

Now here's part two. Think back to a time where somebody came into your office to tell you that "the top" had decided you must change, starting tomorrow, without upfront notice or further explanation. Were the emotional responses the same in both cases? Where lie the differences?

We all respond differently to changes and their contexts. Accepting that helps us to work with it. There's interesting additional information on this topic from leanchange.org.

Process Models

Process Models chart the "How" of change, offering a roadmap for moving from the current state to the desired future state, co-created and aligned with stakeholders.

Since the 1950s and the work of Lewin, process models have formed the basis of change management strategies and implementations. These are traditionally driven by linear, step-by-step approaches.

Today, these process models must be feedback- and iteration-driven because the landscape around organizations changes at a speed that no longer allows for linear approaches. The change will happen while we are still busy implementing it.

Process models describe how to implement change in organizations.

“70% of change fails!” It’s that mythical number again. Though there is no factual evidence of it, we keep hearing this statistic. Now there’s one single truth in change: You can’t get different outcomes by doing the same thing. If X% of change fails, then why would anyone hold on to the same traditional, linear change methodology? Fast moving business environments require adaptive change processes. One key concept in adaptive change processes is co-creation. Read here on the [Lean Change blog](#) what that means.

Why transformation creates pain

Jason Little provides an interesting perspective on the difference between change and transformation reusing the value proposition map as described by Alex Osterwalder in his bestseller, [Business Model Generation](#).

- Change is solving a pain; it brings a solution to a problem at hand.
- Transformation is generating a gain; it’s not about solving a problem but working towards an envisioned, better future.

Though it is nice to distinguish the two, there’s a catch: When everything goes well in an organization, the decision to start a transformation journey turns perfectly functioning processes, structures, and people’s behaviors into pains.

Chasing the gain creates pain where it didn’t exist before. It is *this* that makes transformation complex—a dark place that brings with it pain and suffering.

The journey through the “dark place” of transformation, while daunting, is a passage toward growth. It’s in this challenging phase that organizations confront and redefine their core. A transformation demands not only courage but commitment to a future where the organization emerges as a more adaptive entity, with aligned aspirations.

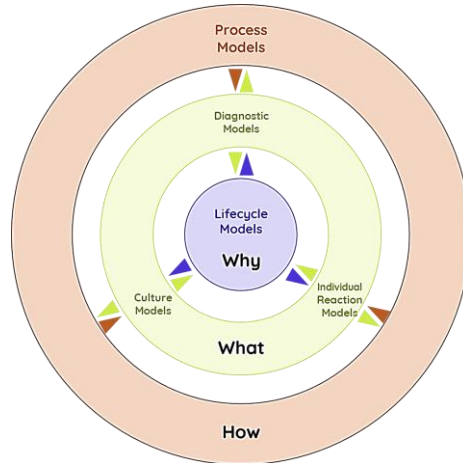
How does transformation work?

The essence of transformation isn’t captured by a single change model. Like pieces of a puzzle, each model focuses on different facets of the organization, indicating that no corner remains untouched by the waves of change.

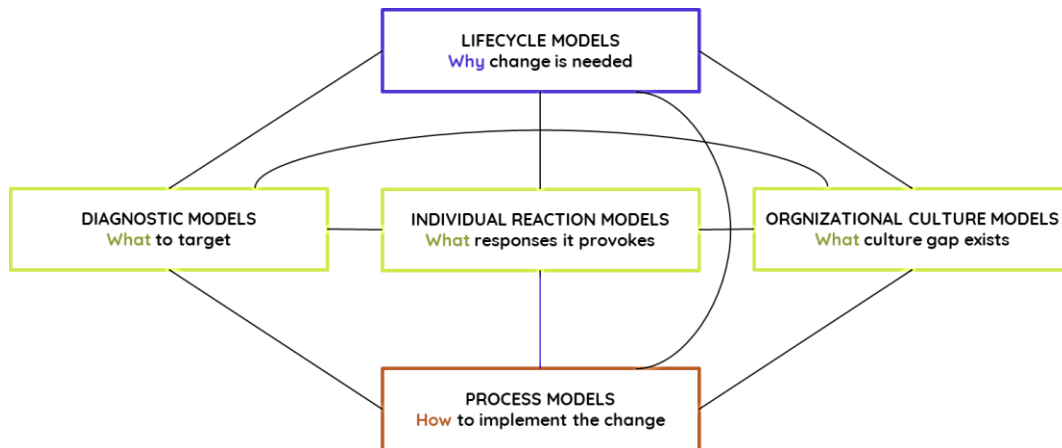
Imagine transformation as a double-doughnut—at its core is the “Why”; the outer layers depict the “What” and “How”. Relying on just one model is like navigating this



complex doughnut with a single guide—it’s likely to lead to running around in circles, without really changing anything (sound familiar?). The true art lies in weaving these models together, and ensuring they interact and align seamlessly—much like gears in a well-oiled machine. Of course, this is a very simplified perspective.



With organizational change being inherently complex, the magic happens in understanding how these models dance together. More crucial than choosing a model is grasping the interplay between them. This synergy is what lights the path to successful transformation.



“The secret of change is to
focus all of our energy,
not on fighting the old,
but on building the new.”

— Socrates