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### Talking the Talk or Walking the Walk? The Leadership of Planned and Emergent Change in a Public Organization

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# Talking the Talk or Walking the Walk? The Leadership of Planned and Emergent Change in a Public Organization

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**ABSTRACT** *The implementation of public management reform may entail radical change for public sector organizations, as it implies changes in the values of the organization. Although such organizational changes are widespread and prevalent in the public sector, the processes through which such changes take place are largely overlooked in the public management literature. By means of an embedded, comparative case study, the authors analyse both planned and emergent processes of change. Their analysis indicates that changes come about through careful reinterpretation and reframing of organizational commitments, rather than replacement of the old by the new values. Moreover, there are important differences in the leadership activities in planned and emergent processes of organizational change. They highlight the need for an increased understanding of the role of leadership in emergent processes of change. In order to successfully change public organizations, they find that the approach to change and corresponding leadership activities should be congruent with the content of the desired organizational change. Managers must dare to go beyond talking the talk and start walking the walk.*

**KEY WORDS:** Leadership, planned change, emergent change, public sector organizations, public management reform

## Introduction

Many government organizations are occupied with the implementation of public management reform. Underlying these reforms is a managerial logic which implies that government organizations should be more based on business-like

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values, rather than Weberian, bureaucratic principals (Wise, 2000). These reforms are aimed at making government organizations more efficient, cost-effective and client oriented (Kickert, 2000). With the widespread occurrence of public management reform, many government organizations are confronted with competing interpretative schemes (Brunsson & Olsen, 1993). For example, the studies of Skalen (2004), Reay and Hinings (2009) and Liguori (2012) focus on how the introduction of managerial principles conflicts with more traditional, administrative values in public service organizations. Meyer and Hammerschmid (2006a) have argued that public management reform does not only result in the implementation of new organizational forms or managerial practices. Such strategic reorientations may also imply a change in the central values or organizational identity of public organizations.

Although public management reform is a widespread and prevalent phenomenon in the public sector, the processes through which such organizational changes take place are largely overlooked in the public management literature (Kickert, 2010; Kuipers et al., in press). Apart from some notable exceptions (for example, Karp & Helgø, 2008; Sminia & Van Nistelrooij, 2006), the literature on public management reform is disconnected from the literature on change management. Theory on change management mostly stems from private sector research (Stewart & Kringas, 2003). This is unfortunate, as the specific characteristics of public organizations may put distinct demands on the management of change (Boyne, 2006; McNulty & Ferlie, 2004).

Following the strong emphasis on leadership in the literature on change management (Higgs & Rowland, 2005, 2010; Kotter, 1996), the authors concentrate their analysis on the role of leadership during a process of organizational change. Leadership is indispensable for initiating and driving change (Borins, 2002; Burke, 2002), but it remains an elusive concept. It is not an isolated phenomenon, but leadership activities take place within the context of organizational change processes. Organizational change can come about in a planned or an emergent manner (By, 2005). Although prior research indicates that different types of organizational change require different leadership activities (Higgs & Rowland, 2005), the literature on change leadership does not differentiate between leading change in planned or emergent processes. This study aims to contribute to change leadership theory by examining how planned and emergent processes of organizational change unfold, with a special focus on the changes in organizational values, and by identifying the leadership activities in both planned and emergent processes of change. The main research question of this study is: *What is the role of leadership during planned and emergent processes of organizational change?*

In the next section, the authors elaborate on the theoretical background of this study. In the third section, they discuss the criteria for case selection and other methodological considerations. The selected cases are also introduced in this section. The fourth section is focused on the process of change. In the fifth section, they analyse the role of leadership during processes of change. They present a discussion of their results and recommendations for future research in the sixth section and formulate their conclusions in the seventh section.

## **Theoretical Background**

Many public organizations are implementing reforms. Some of these changes concern small-scale improvements, while other changes may entail radical transformation. Contemporary reform in the public sector is often based on the idea that the operations of government organizations should be more based on business-like principles (Wise, 2000). Some reforms, such as privatization or contracting out, have affected the organization of public services, while reforms such as performance management and decentralization of management authority target the way public organizations operate (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004). Despite opposing views concerning the distinction between public and private organizations (for an overview see Rainey, 1997), public organizations can be said to highlight rigid structures, hierarchy and control to ensure ideal values such as accountability, legality, incorruptibility, expertise, reliability, effectiveness, impartiality and equity. Private sector values, on the other hand, include, for example, client service, competition, cost-effectiveness, profitability, efficiency and innovativeness (Jørgensen & Bozeman, 2007; Van der Wal, de Graaf, & Lasthuizen, 2008).

The values underlying public management reform are often secondary or even alien to public organizations. Such values are not necessarily the opposite of public sector values. Rather, they represent a set of counter-ideal values that define what public organizations are not (Van Quaquebeke, Kerschreiter, Buxton, & Van Dick, 2010). Such counter-values are disconnected from public values and may therefore be perceived as inappropriate or undesirable in the public sector. Through the application of private sector management techniques, private sector values thus challenge the traditional values that lie at the basis of the nature of public organizations (Antonsen & Jørgensen, 1997; Boyne, 2002). Meyer and Hammerschmid (2006b, p. 99) have argued that this makes public management reform an 'identity project'. The public management literature contains much evidence of such reforms, for example, in health care (Reay & Hinings, 2009; Skalen, 2004), the national civil service (Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006a, 2006b), academia (Diefenbach, 2007; Gioia & Thomas, 1996) and local government (Liguori, 2012). Rather than merely improving the operations of public organizations, public management reform may thus entail the radical transformation of public organizations (Greenwood & Hinings, 1996).

The planned and emergent approach to change are the two dominant approaches for bringing about organizational change (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). The planned approach to change is based on the assumption that organizations are stable entities. In order to bring about change, an organization can be moved from the unsatisfactory current state to a desired future state (By, 2005). This implies that the objectives of change are formulated in advance. Central to the planned approach to change is the idea that organizations must evolve through a series of necessary phases in order to reach the desired future state (Bamford & Forrester, 2003). In contrast with the planned approach to change, the emergent approach sees organizations as entities that are continuously adapting to their ever-changing environment (Burnes, 1996). Instead of changing in a direction that is determined a priori, an emergent change process is an open-ended, often bottom-up, process of adaptation (By, 2005). While the planned approach is

primarily aimed at achieving a predetermined outcome, the outcome of an emergent change process is not defined, although a general direction is known. Although the emergent approach explains change through bottom-up initiatives and learning, emergent changes can accumulate and result in large scale change over time (e.g. Plowman et al., 2007). In this article, the authors see planned and emergent change as opposite approaches to implement organizational change. The issue for managers and others involved in change is to ensure that the approach adopted matches the circumstances (Burnes, 1996, p. 17).

The view that leadership contributes greatly to the success of the implementation of change is central to the literature on change management (Borins, 2002; Higgs & Rowland, 2010). In this study, the authors therefore focus their attention on the activities of individuals, with or without a formal management position, through which they attempt to influence the implementation of organizational change. Theories of leadership often focus on how leaders exercise their capacity to influence their followers (Burke, 2002). Apart from this traditional perspective, more recent studies have emphasized a more relational conceptualization in which leadership is distributed over a larger group of individuals (Martin, Currie, & Finn, 2009; Oborn, Barrett, & Dawson, 2013). The main leadership theory that emphasizes organizational change is the theory of transformational leadership (Bass, 1985; Eisenbach, Watson, & Pillai, 1999). While the transformational leadership style did not come about as primarily intended for leading change, it is often positively related to the implementation of change (Burke, 2002; Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008). The core of the transformational leadership theory is that 'by articulating a vision, fostering the acceptance of group goals, and providing individualized support, effective leaders change the basic values, beliefs, and attitudes of followers' (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Bommer, 1996, p. 260). Gill (2003) and Karp and Helgø (2008) state that leadership activities during organizational change should consist of role modelling and empowering and motivating employees.

Change leadership is not an isolated phenomenon. Leadership activities take place in the context of the organizational change process. While the literature on organizational change suggests a contingency model by offering multiple approaches to change (Burnes, 1996; Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Dunphy & Stace, 1993), it is striking that successful leadership activities are presented as a one best way method. The contemporary change leadership literature does not take into account whether organizational change comes about through a planned or emergent process. Planned change is initiated and directed by change leaders. The role of change leadership is thus most prominent in the planned approach to change. But change leadership is also needed during emergent processes of change. Rather, than acting as 'hero' (Higgs & Rowland, 2010; Stewart & Kringas, 2003) or 'prime mover', emergent processes of change ask for a sense maker who redirects change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). However, the literature on leading change corresponds mostly, if not exclusively, with the planned perspective on change (compare Eisenbach et al., 1999). Despite some exceptions (for example, Higgs & Rowland, 2005) there is a need to further differentiate between (effective) leadership activities in both planned and emergent processes of change.

Changes in the values of organizations may have consequences for the identification of employees with the organization. In recent years, several studies have

focused on the interrelationships between change, leadership and identity. Social identity theory states that resistance to change can be understood as an attempt by employees to maintain their identity (Van Dijk & Van Dick, 2009). Employees that identify strongly with the values of the organization are likely to resist change with negative consequences (Drzensky, Egold, & Van Dick, 2012). It is therefore important for change leaders to provide employees with a projected sense of continuity that indicates ‘where are we going and what can we do to make it happen?’ (Ullrich, Wieseke, & van Dick, 2005, p. 1562).

### Case Selection and Method

An embedded comparative case study design is used to meet the objectives of this study and answer the main research question. The case study design fits this research objective of developing theory. Moreover, the embedded comparative design allows the authors to study two distinct processes of change within an identical context (Yin, 2009). Two organizational units within the City Works Department in the Dutch city Rotterdam were selected as a case. The City Works Department is concerned with the urban planning and the spatial upkeep of the city. In terms of the organization’s former slogan: *The City Works Department gives shape to the city, and keeps the city in shape*. The organization’s slogan is twofold in order to account for its two underlying organizational units. The Engineering Bureau is concerned with shaping the city: directing the realization of infrastructural, spatial planning. The Public Works sector is concerned with keeping the city in shape: the maintenance and upkeep of the city’s public grounds. Due to managerial reforms, the organization has been dissolved as of June 2012. Its two organizational units are to be separated and merged in two administrative clusters.

This organization was selected as a case for this study because the City Works Department is considered a ‘rich’ case concerning the content of the organizational change taking place. The desired organizational change closely fits the shift from bureaucratic to managerial archetype in the public management literature (for example, Liguori, 2012; Meyer & Hammerschmid, 2006a). Moreover, the case is especially interesting from the perspective of change management because the two organizational units have adopted antitypical approaches to change. The Engineering Bureau has adopted a planned approach to change, while the Public Works sector has used an emergent approach. Qualitative methods were used for data collection. Interviews were conducted with managers and employees in both organizational units. In total, 23 interviews were conducted, spanning over six hierarchical levels. The interviews were recorded and fully transcribed. The transcripts were then coded according to the central concepts of the study: the content of the organizational change, the process of change and leadership activities.

### Process of Change

In this section, the authors discuss the processes of change in both organizational units. They first provide some background to the study by elaborating on the consequences of the strategic reorientation for the central values in the City Works Department. They then describe the change process of both its organizational

units: the Engineering Bureau and the Public Works sector. They conclude this section by comparing both cases on relevant aspects of the change process.

#### *A Strategic Reorientation as a Shift in Values*

According to respondents, the City Works Department mainly consists of highly skilled professionals, many of them engineers, who are intrinsically motivated to work in the projects the spatial planning and upkeep of the city. Respondents characterize the organization as an organization that was traditionally very hierarchical and bureaucratic with a directive, top-down management style. In more recent years, societal, political and economic developments caused the organization to change its strategic orientation. The new strategy was based on more collaborative orientation on the environment and being more responsive to the demands of stakeholders, rather than initiating and executing projects without the interference of external actors. The strategic reorientation also affected the organization's dominant management style, which relies more on participative management and increased delegation of responsibilities.

The strategic reorientation had considerable consequences for the central values of the organization. The former executive manager of City Works Department can be seen as a proponent of the traditional values of the organization. In the following quotation, he responds to the increased demands for increased responsiveness and transparency concerning the operations of the Engineering Bureau. His statement makes apparent that, in his view, these values conflict with the organization's professional autonomy:

The organization was criticized for being a closed system, an ivory tower. In my view, this was not the case. You see, building bridges is just a very complex thing, some people simply lack the expertise to understand it.

His successor, who was responsible for initiating the strategic turnaround at the organization, disagrees with this view. He reflects on the need for the Engineering Bureau to become more oriented on their environment:

The Engineering Bureau is really inside a bubble. They sit inside their office tower and they rarely come outside. This has been the case for a long time. They don't see what is happening in the outside world!

Respondents indicate that the professionals of the organizations typically focused on pursuing the highest quality in their projects. As a result of the strategic reorientation, efficiency became a more dominant value in the operations of the organization. The former executive manager of the City Works Department reflects on this change:

To me, this is still incomprehensible. In 20 years' time, the public will have forgotten about the implementation costs of any project. All that matters at that point is the quality of what we delivered.

Interviews with current managers reveal that managerial values such as time and cost efficiency are already more accepted in the organization. When discussing the performance of the organization, managers focus on time and costs. For example, the current executive manager of the Public Works sector says:

In terms of time, quality and costs we score an unsatisfactory grade. (...) There is a real urgency to change!

Table 1 is based on the interviews with respondents from both the Engineering Bureau and the Public Works Sector and summarizes the characteristics of the current and desired organization.

*The Engineering Bureau: Planned Change*

The Engineering Bureau is obligated to review its business positioning every four years. As a result of this, they concluded that a strategic reorientation would be necessary. Assisted by an external management consultancy bureau, the board of directors formulated the content of the envisioned organizational change. One of the members of the board of directors elaborates on his motivation for the way the content of change came about:

It is my deepest conviction that it is necessary to make choices about what we want to be. It is the foundation of the trajectory we are in right now.

The content of the desired change originated almost entirely from the board of directors. One of the major challenges of the change process was to effectively communicate the change to the rest of the organization. An important aspect of the communication programme was the use of slogans or catchphrases. Over the course of several years, multiple slogans were used, such as ‘New Engineering’, ‘Owners Engineer’ and ‘From Engineering to Advisory’. Members of the board of directors express that it was difficult to formulate a slogan that

**Table 1.** A strategic reorientation as a shift in values

	Current organization	Desired organization
Sense of self	Civil servant	Public manager/public professional
Central values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quality</li> <li>• Task oriented</li> <li>• Professional autonomy</li> <li>• (Being in) control, security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Time and cost efficiency</li> <li>• Environment oriented</li> <li>• Transparency and consultation</li> <li>• Participation and decentralization</li> </ul>
Attitude towards environment	<i>Paternalistic:</i> ‘we know what’s best for citizens’, ‘the city is ours’	<i>Responsive:</i> ‘we are here for the city’
Dominant management style	Directive, top-down	Delegating responsibilities, participative

encompasses all aspects of the organizational change and, more importantly, make the desired change more concrete and tangible to organizational members:

To be honest: New Engineering sounds like a laundry detergent brand to me. What does it mean? (...) The philosophy behind it was very good and it has something for employees to relate to, but how do you explain that?

Underlying the desired organizational change are values such as transparency and responsiveness. Because of the diversity in tasks performed in the Engineering Bureau, such values mean something different for every employee in terms of actual behaviour. The content of the desired organizational change is thus characterized by a high degree of ambiguity. This is not only perceived as a problematic situation by members of the board of directors, as illustrated by the previous quotation, but also at lower levels in the organizational hierarchy. A middle manager reflects on this issue:

Everybody in the organization says that we have to go 'From Engineering to Advisory', but everybody has a different view on what that means in daily practice. (...) We have to make clear what it means for the behavior of employees!

As is evident from this comment, managers in the organization perceive the high degree of ambiguity as undesirable. Because managers find it difficult to make the organizational change more concrete to employees, they have been hesitant to communicate openly. In the words of a middle manager:

It is absolutely pointless to start informing people when things are still in the idea stage. It will cause people to become insecure and start asking questions I don't have an answer to. (...) We made sure that the information we passed on was filtered so that it was comprehensible for employees and that we would have answers to their questions. However, what becomes apparent now, at least in my department, is that too little has been communicated in the past years.

Respondents feel that an incomplete message would trigger more uncertainty among organizational members. Similar to the top-down way in which the content of the proposed change came about, the management attempted to reduce uncertainty with the implementation of a top-down communication programme. A member of the board of directors elaborates:

We are making presentations for supervisors so they can explain to their team what we are going to do and why it is good. We've compiled a whole communication program in order to reduce cold feet among employees.

Because the content of change was ambiguous for lower-level organizational members, the board of directors mandated a so-called strategy team, consisting of organizational members at the employee level, to participate in the organizational change process. The role of this strategy team is to elaborate on and fill in the objectives that were already defined by the board of directors. The effective

influence of employees on the change process is thus somewhat limited. Another limiting factor is the fact that the strategy team has no actual decision-making authority in the change process. A member of the strategy team explains this advisory role:

At the very least we present them with a different point of view. But the product of the strategy team is not something that will certainly be implemented. (...) It is more an advice than that it is binding.

The degree of employee participation in the change process of the Engineering Bureau was rather limited. Several reasons can be identified for this. First, only the few employees who were part of the strategy team were able to participate. Second, they were only allowed to elaborate on the content of change that was already formulated by the board of directors. Third, participation only came about at a late point in time. According to a middle manager, this severely limited the effectiveness of the sudden participatory approach:

Effectively, the direction of the change is determined in the boardroom. (...) The management of change is very top-down and detailed. By doing so, they have created a culture in which employees are not encouraged to think along, because well, it would be of no use. And now this is suddenly expected in order to make real changes, and then it becomes apparent that a lot of employees have real difficulties in doing so.

#### *The Public Works Sector: Emergent Change*

Similar to the Engineering Bureau, the desired change of the Public Works sector was also initiated by the board of directors. However, the responsibility for the process of change was delegated from the board of directors to a small project team consisting of lower-level supervisors and employees. For an organization that was traditionally characterized by hierarchy and a directive management style, this was an unconventional approach. One of the members of the project team comments:

It is also different because, someone like me is a member of this group instead of senior managers. This group was deliberately composed of people who know what goes on at the employee level, who are closer to that.

Not just the delegation of authority to this project team was unconventional for the organization. The first step of the project team in the change process was to conduct a series of interviews with important environmental stakeholders in order to discover the opinion of these stakeholders concerning the Public Works sector. The results of these interviews were subsequently used as input for the content of the desired change. A member of the board of directors explains why these interviews were an atypical approach for the organization:

I cannot reflect infinitely on the history of this organization, but for as far as I know we had never asked our environment for their opinion about us. And that's what we

did do. We went to the city's boroughs, to contractors, to other municipalities. A reasonably sized external survey in order to find out how we were perceived by our environment.

Based on the interviews with environmental stakeholders, the project team formulated four themes that together comprised the desired change, which was labelled *Topshape*. The four dimensions were briefly introduced on a single sheet of A4 paper. Because of this, the four themes, such as 'Expertise in *Topshape*' and 'Connection in *Topshape*' maintained a high degree of abstraction. Rather than trying to eliminate this ambiguity, as in the case of the Engineering Bureau, this abstraction was carefully preserved during the change process. As one of the members of the project team explains, the ambiguity inherent in these themes allows individual employees to relate to the change in his or her own way:

That is the underlying idea. We could have written an elaborate plan, complete with many examples of what 'Connection in *Topshape*' means. But it means something different for everyone. So we shortly described what it means in abstract terms, but not what kind of actions or behaviors are attached to it. We decided to leave that open. It is something different for every department and every employee. It allows them to discuss it with each other.

The participation of employees in the change process was not limited to the instalment of the project team. Employees were invited to contribute to and discuss the four themes in working groups and other sessions. At one point, over 140 employees were actively participating in the realization of the change. Despite the emphasis on employee participation, top-down change communication was still present in the change process. Communication was mainly focused on establishing a sense of urgency. A middle manager reflects on a meeting where the need for a change was communicated to employees:

There we addressed the need for change, and we asked them to think along about the process that we are entering right now. We did not yet have a fixed plan, but we did state that we wanted to accomplish this by July next year. That is the perspective we outlined at that time.

A final important aspect of the approach to change of the Public Works sector concerns the way the organizational change was framed. In contrast with the Engineering Bureau, the content of change was deliberately presented as an elaboration on the organization's current values, rather than a radical breakaway from the past. The change process was labelled *Topshape*, which builds on the old slogan of the organization: 'we keep the city in shape'. A member of the project team explains the motivation for this frame:

The idea there is to appreciate what was before. It is a form of respect, so to say. I've seen organizational changes where a new leader barges in out of nowhere saying:

‘everything you’ve been doing is wrong!’ I don’t think that is much of a motivation for most people.

### *Comparison*

While the Engineering Bureau and the Public Works sector attempted to bring about a similar change in their strategic orientation and central values, they used very distinct approaches to organizational change. The approach to change of the Engineering Bureau can for a large part be characterized as a planned process in which higher-level managers determined the content of the change. In the change process at the Engineering Bureau, a small team of employees was allowed to drive the change process. Detailed objectives of the organizational change were not formulated at the beginning of the change process, but came about during the process. Managers at the Engineering Bureau attempted to eliminate ambiguity by an elaborate top-down communication programme. At the Public Works sector, communication was mainly focused on establishing a sense of urgency. Here, ambiguity served an opportunity for individual employees to connect with the change. The participation of employees was much more extensive in the change process of the Public Works sector. A final difference is that the content of change was framed as improvement rather than replacement at the Public Works sector. The differences between the two change processes are summed up in Table 2.

### **Leadership of Change**

In this section, the authors elaborate on the role of leadership during the two processes of change. Because change leaders are embedded in processes of organizational change, they make a distinction between the leadership activities in the planned and emergent process of change discussed in the previous section. They first reflect on the model of leadership in both processes of change. After that they outline the most important leadership activities in both processes of change.

#### *Leadership in the Planned Process of Change*

The role of leadership in the planned process of change fits a traditional leadership perspective in which the leadership role is concentrated in a select number of individuals. These are mainly the members of the executive management team. Three types of leadership activities can be identified in the data concerning the planned process of change. These activities are: communicating the change, being a role model and the appointment and dismissal of ‘culture champions’.

*Communicating the change.* Especially in the planned change process of the Engineering Bureau, communication of change is an important aspect of the change process. Because the overall vision of change has been communicated through official announcements, documents and the organization’s intranet,

**Table 2.** Planned and emergent processes of organizational change

	Engineering Bureau	Public Works sector
Development of the content of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Top-down</i>: Devised by board of directors</li> <li>• A priori formulated objectives of change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Bottom-up</i>: Devised by project team and environmental stakeholders</li> <li>• Emergent objectives of change</li> </ul>
Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on sense of urgency</li> <li>• Focused on content of change</li> <li>• Aimed at decreasing ambiguity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focused on the sense of urgency</li> <li>• Aimed at stimulating interpretation</li> </ul>
Participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Relatively late in the change process</li> <li>• Participation of project team</li> <li>• Outcome is advisory</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Delegation to project team from the start</li> <li>• Participation of project team and over 140 employees</li> <li>• Outcome is binding</li> </ul>
Role of ambiguity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambiguity as a threat</li> <li>• Eliminate it!</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambiguity as an opportunity</li> <li>• Preserve it!</li> </ul>
Type of change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Replacement/frame breaking</i>: Content of change is disconnected from former slogans and values</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Modification/frame bending</i>: Former slogans and values as foundation for the objectives of change</li> </ul>

managers devote a lot of their time to communicating the need for change in a more personal way. When asked about his views on the role of leadership in organizational change, a member of the board of directors responds:

I think by recognizing the moments when it is necessary to emphasize the need for change. Not by standing on a platform, but also in general meetings. Day to day things. (...) It has to become a regular thing, not just at speeches. But you must ensure that the entire management team speaks with one voice, so that you don't contradict each other.

In response to the high level of abstraction of the desired change, managers attempt to play a part in translating the change objectives into more operational behaviours for their individual employees. This is especially the case for lower-level managers and direct supervisors. They try to raise awareness for the organizational change, make clear what is expected of employees and attempt to identify and take away resistance to change.

*Being a role model.* In the literature on the leadership of organizational change, the importance of role models is often outlined (Karp & Helgø, 2008). Within the planned change process of the Engineering Bureau, managers indicate that they often strive to provide their employees with examples of what the organizational change encompasses. These leadership activities are aimed at making the content of change more concrete to employees. Lower-level managers often refer to the board of directors when talking about role models. As the initiators of the

organizational change, their behaviour is believed to have the largest impact on employees. A middle manager states:

Right now we are busy with having the director portray examples of good behavior, in the sense of this is what we mean with it and this is also what we have in mind.

The board of directors plays an important role in being visible during the process of change. Often, it is difficult to function as a role model in concrete behaviour. Respondents state that being a role model is also about the showcasing of prioritizations in order to remind employees of the need for change. A member of the board of directors explains:

I try to attend meetings that encompass 'the new', so to say. But that is something I expect of all managers in the organization.

*Appointments and dismissal of employees.* A direct way of influencing the dominant values in the organization that is executed on the strategic leadership level is the dismissal of key figures in the organization and the appointment of new 'culture champions' in important positions in the organization. These are individuals that are obvious representatives of the envisioned organizational change. However, the dismissal of personnel is often difficult because their position is protected by extensive legislation. Leaders that use strategic appointments as a way of inserting the new values in the organization are often sceptical about the organizational capability for change without such interventions. A senior manager elaborates on his motivation for applying this leadership activity:

I believe that it has to go extinct, it has to go literally extinct. Such a feeling [a value traditionally embodied in the organization] disappears when the champions of the culture of the last decades leave the organization.

Related to the appointment of culture champions, another method to bring about change in the values of the organization is to formalize and professionalize the procedures through which new managers are selected. Through assessments and management development programmes, future managers will be fitter to operate according to a more managerial logic.

#### *Leadership in the Emergent Process of Change*

The role of leadership in the emergent process of change can be seen as distributed over a larger number of individuals. Woods, Bennet, Harvey, and Wise (2004) state that distributed leadership is characterized by leadership activities that are performed by a wider range of individuals, whose combined range of capabilities and expertise causes outcomes to be greater than the sum of their individual efforts. A member of the project team reflects on how the members of the project team collectively took up a leadership role in the project:

I did pay attention to the combination of the members. They have to enjoy doing this together. And when you take into account their competences, that you include people who are skilled in, for example, communication. (...) And through the dynamics in our group something emerges that you did not think of yourself. There is a lot of energy in that group.

In comparison with the Engineering Bureau, the leadership role in the change process of the Public Works sector was thus distributed over more individuals and hierarchical levels. Once again, three types of leadership activities can be identified. These activities are: communicating the change, highlighting role models and institutionalizing the new leadership model.

*Communicating change.* The change process of the Public Works sector contained more participation of employees than the planned change process of the Engineering Bureau. Despite this difference, communication of change still is an important aspect of a more emergent change process. Similar to the Engineering Bureau, managers at the Public Works sector have been very active in communicating the need for change. However, there are also important differences when it comes to the communication of change. Rather than actively translating the desired organizational change to the situation of individual employees, the communication activities at the Public Works sector are more aimed at having employees discuss the content of change and its consequences among themselves. In this sense, interpretations of the desired change are not derived from the management but from employees themselves.

*Highlighting role models.* The necessity of role models is also stressed in the emergent change process. Role models portray examples of desired behaviour and help employees understand what the objectives of change mean in daily practice. However, rather than highlighting the board of directors or the lower-level managers as role models, employees function as role models in the *Topshape* programme of the Public Works sector. A member of the programme's project team explains:

We came up with a ball as a symbol for Topshape: 'The ball is in your court, not the court of the management or the board of directors'. (...) A golden ball circulated in the organization among people who distinguished themselves in one of the themes of the Topshape program.

A member of the board of directors adds:

Employees with good ideas about the themes could be nominated for the golden ball by their co-workers. I handed out the first one, and after that it circulated in the organization. The board of directors was not allowed to intervene. It was up to the employees.

The circulation of a golden ball within the organizational unit did not only provide a sense of competition between departments and individual employees.

More importantly, it also enabled organizational members to learn from each other. The showcasing of how individual employees operationalize the themes of the *Topshape* programme is much more concrete and relevant than the examples provided by the organization's management.

*Institutionalizing the new leadership model.* Underlying the change process of the Public Works sector is a leadership model that is not located at the apex of the organization, but rather is distributed throughout the organization. Implicit in the leadership activities aimed at communicating the change and role modelling is the participation of employees. In this sense, the scope of this distributed leadership model goes beyond a traditional, hierarchical perspective on leadership. However, the adoption of this new leadership model cannot be taken for granted. Respondents are aware that the institutionalization of this leadership model requires their attention and effort. The institutionalization of this leadership model consists of two elements. First, managers attempt to apply the organizational change on their own behaviour and, second, they focus their attention on activating organizational members. Many respondents realize that in order for the values and behaviours of employees to change, they must first change themselves. These managers were convinced that in order to break away from the organization's traditional values, managers must apply the principles of the desired change on themselves. A supervisor explains:

I must also apply the change on myself. I am very inclined to a high degree of control. I enjoy the new way of working, but I have to learn to let the old go. I've been working in this organization for a very long time; I was brought up in this organization. The way you act is very dependent on the organization's culture.

However, letting go of the traditional leadership model is not enough. Respondents indicate that the delegation of authority to employees and more emphasis on participation does not automatically lead to the anticipated results. Paradoxically, the emergence of a distributed leadership model is dependent on the role of formal managers. A member of the project team reflects on this trade-off between traditional and distributed forms of leadership:

Partly based on our history, my view on leadership is that people still tend to focus on the leader. People derive from the leader what is desired and undesired behavior in the organization. But what we wanted was that people would take more personal responsibility. So the management has to provide a framework for behavior in the organization, but not too much.

The institutionalization of a more distributed leadership model thus requires the careful combining of devolving responsibilities and taking a step back, while, at the same time, preserving a more traditional leadership model by providing direction for employees. Balancing between providing direction and letting go is a constant challenge for managers. A member of the board of directors reflects on how this is both uneasy and necessary at the same time:

Very often people feel you should take the lead. I am sure people think I should be more directive at times, slamming my fist on the table. And sometimes you have to, but you have to be careful with that. It is a very fragile process.

## Discussion

In order to implement changes concerning the strategic orientation and central values of the organization, the Engineering Bureau adopted a planned approach to change. At the Public Works sector, an emergent approach was adopted. Their *Topshape* approach was framed as an improvement of the organization's former slogan. By balancing between stability and innovation, they were able to conserve parts of the organization's former bureaucratic character, while simultaneously adding more managerial values. While the literature on organizational change suggests that radical organizational change typically takes place through replacement (for example, Greenwood & Hinings, 1996), this analysis suggests an opposite approach may be similarly effective. 'Revolutionary rhetoric is likely to produce counter-revolutionary responses. (...) In contrast, even extreme changes may be more readily accepted when they are framed in a way that allows people to conserve their own sense of personal and organizational identity' (Kraatz & Block, 2008, p. 834). This analysis thus supports the view that radical organizational change takes place through careful reinterpretation and reframing of organizational commitments, instead of a perspective that portrays change as a replacement of the old by the new (compare Pratt & Foreman, 2000). This is coherent with research that suggests that organizational identities are not replaced by a new paradigm, but that the two conflicting views are merged into a new identity (Skalen, 2004). During radical organizational change, prior research indicates that it is crucial to provide employees with a sense of continuity (Giessner, 2011; Ullrich et al., 2005; Van Knippenberg, Van Knippenberg, Monden, & de Lima, 2002). Because of its focus on improvement rather than replacement, an emergent approach to implementing organizational change may therefore be more beneficial than the planned approach. This analysis, however, does not enable the authors to formulate statements about the effectiveness of planned and emergent approaches to organizational change. A first recommendation for future research is therefore to empirically test the effectiveness of planned and emergent approaches concerning organizational change in public organizations.

A central standpoint in the literature on change management is that both planned and emergent approaches can be used to implement organizational change. Burnes (1996) has argued there is no one best way to managing change. Other authors call for a contingency model, in which contextual factors determine whether a planned or emergent approach to change is adopted (Burnes & Jackson, 2011; Dunphy & Stace, 1993). Some authors claim that both approaches can be used to strengthen each other (Burnes, 2004; Sminia & van Nistelrooij, 2006). In contrast, the change management literature offers only a single model on (successful) leadership activities concerning organizational change. Successful change leadership activities include explaining the vision of change, communicating, motivating and inspiring subordinates, role modelling and empowering employees (Gill, 2003;

Herold et al., 2008; Karp & Helgø, 2008). Similar activities are also prescribed in planned approaches to change, such as Kotter (1996) and Fernandez and Rainey (2006). There is thus a conceptual overlap between the concepts of change leadership and planned change (compare Eisenbach et al., 1999). Because of this, the literature on organizational change currently lacks a coherent model of change leadership that fits the emergent perspective on change. This study underlines the importance of attention for the role of leadership during emergent change, because important differences can be seen between the leadership activities in the planned and emergent process of change. These differences are summarized in Table 3.

In the planned process of change, the leadership role is concentrated in senior management of the organization. Their leadership activities closely fit the literature on the leadership of organizational change, such as communicating the vision and content of change and functioning as a role model. However, in the emergent process of change, change leadership takes on a different form. Rather than being concentrated in a limited number of individuals, the leadership role is distributed over a large group of individuals, spanning several hierarchical levels in the organization. Leadership activities aimed at communication and role modelling are also present in the emergent process of change, but they are much more aimed at the participation of organizational members. In this respect, it could be argued that the participation of employees is as much part of leadership as the activities of managers.

The third, and perhaps most fundamental, type of leadership activity in the emergent change process is aimed at the institutionalization of distributed leadership in the organization. What is striking here is the paradoxical relationship between traditional, managerial forms of leadership and more distributed, participative forms of leadership. On the one hand, the institutionalization of a model

**Table 3.** Leadership during planned and emergent change

Planned change	Emergent change
<i>Traditional leadership perspective</i>	<i>Distributed leadership perspective</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership role is concentrated in senior management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership role is divided over large number of individuals and hierarchical levels</li> </ul>
<i>Leadership activities</i>	<i>Leadership activities</i>
Communication	Communication
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressing the need for change</li> <li>• Making the content of change personal</li> <li>• Reducing ambiguity</li> <li>• Identifying and taking away resistance to change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stressing the need for change</li> <li>• Stimulating discussion about change among employees</li> </ul>
Being a role model	Highlighting role models
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Senior) management functions as the main role model during change</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Highlighting employees as role models</li> </ul>
Appointments and dismissal of employees	Institutionalizing the new leadership model
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dismissal of former culture champions</li> <li>• Formalizing selection procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applying the change on yourself</li> <li>• Activation of organizational members</li> </ul>

of distributed leadership is dependent on the yielding of authority by managers. On the other hand, managerial authority remains necessary in order to provide direction and stimulate employees to take on a leadership role. As van Wart (2005, pp. 372–373) states: ‘shared leadership ultimately requires both a willingness to cede leadership to others on the part of organizational heads and the capacity of other actors to take it on’. This analysis thus indicates that while emergent processes of change rely on a more distributed model of leadership, traditional hierarchical leadership is and should not be completely absent.

Private sector research on change leadership often highlights a traditional, transformational leadership perspective (Stewart & Kringas, 2003; Thomas, 1996). However, a perspective on leadership as a distributed phenomenon is already more prevalent in public sector research, due to its ambiguous and political nature (for example, Martin et al., 2009). At the same time, other characteristics of public sector organization argue against the adoption of a distributed leadership model, such as elaborate organizational structures and hierarchy, limited autonomy and an emphasis on top-down management (Woods et al., 2004).

Other authors have outlined the importance of congruence in the implementation of organizational change. Selznick (1957), Brunsson and Olsen (1993) and Greenwood and Hinings (1996) stress the importance of congruence between the content of a change initiative and the values in the organization. Similarly, Burnes and Jackson (2011) highlight a fit between the central values in the organization and the approach to change. Along with other researchers (for example, Higgs & Rowland, 2005, 2011; Weick & Quinn, 1999), the authors have argued for corresponding change leadership, depending on the type of or approach to organizational change. The analysis shows that managers in the emergent process consciously attempt to apply the organizational change on themselves. Rather than just communicating the change to organizational members, these managers attempt to break away from their old routines of directive management. At the Engineering Bureau, the management used top-down communication to clarify the organizational change. By doing so, the desired change was limited to rhetoric. At the Public Works sector, the approach to change and the corresponding leadership activities were an embodiment of the desired organizational change. This indicates a fit between the change objectives, the approach to change and the leadership activities in the change process. When the approach to change and the leadership activities are incongruent with the content of a change initiative, the outcome of a change process may be counter-effective. As Higgs and Rowland (2010, p. 123) argue: ‘It is important that leaders have a good level of self-awareness that enables them to see that their own mindsets and behaviors may indeed contribute to reinforcing rather than challenging existing systems’.

## **Conclusion**

The implementation of public management reform may entail radical change for public sector organizations, as it implies changes in the values of the organization. This study supports the view that changes in the values of public organizations

come about through careful adaptation and reinterpretation of existing values. This would imply that an emergent approach to change is more appropriate than the planned approach to change. Moreover, the emphasis on participation rather than top-down communication of the emergent perspective is beneficial for making the desired changes concrete and relevant for employees. Paradoxically, the emphasis on decreasing ambiguity of the planned perspective results in the introduction of change objectives that are of little relevance for individual employees. This analysis further reveals differences in the type and execution of leadership activities between the planned and emergent approaches to change. While the role of leadership in planned processes is well accounted for in change management literature, the role of leadership in emergent processes of change is in the authors' view overlooked. Finally, this analysis suggests that, in order to successfully change the values of public sector organizations, the approach to change and corresponding leadership activities should be congruent with the content of organizational change. The planned approach to change, with characteristics such as top-down communication and an emphasis on the role of senior management, may reinforce rather than challenge the current bureaucratic nature of public organizations. In an emergent process of change, the leadership of change is distributed over a larger group of individuals and hierarchical levels. The authors therefore argue that the leadership of a change in values in the public sector goes beyond the top-down communication of the desired change. The leadership of change itself should also be subject to the change in values. By shaping a participatory approach to change and delegating leadership responsibilities, effective change leadership consists of walking the walk instead of merely talking the talk.

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