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# Organizational Change in the Land-Grant System: A Qualitative Evaluation

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**Abstract**

*Individuals representing different organizations within the Land-Grant University System (LGUS) were asked to provide their insights on organizational change using a focus group approach. The study focused on three key components to organizational change in the LGUS: what initiates change, the hindrances to change, and what sustains change. Themes were analyzed relative to the existing literature and synthesized into a new conceptual model of organizational change in the LGUS. Results indicated change can be effectively initiated at lower levels of the organization where individuals have the appropriate span of control to drive change. Bureaucratic inertia was identified as the primary hindrance to change in the LGUS. Finally, relationships were identified as most important for sustaining change. Based on the results recommendations suggest that organizations within the LGUS employ a balance between proactive and reactive change and establish a clear communication plan and to ensure the plan emphasizes the respect due to those that will be involved or affected. Furthermore, to mitigate the effects of bureaucratic inertia, any organizational change effort within the LGUS should be accompanied by enough time to analyze the culture and build organizational support and buy-in. Additional recommendations were provided based on the results of the study.*

**Keywords:** organizational change, land grant university system, evaluation

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## Introduction

In late 2007 Alan Deutschman published the book, *Change or Die: The Three Keys to Change at Work and in Life*. Almost ten years later, the premise of his work remains both relevant and critical for individuals and organizations; specifically, change is inevitable and must be embraced to mitigate obsolescence (Deutschman, 2007). The need for meaningful change and adaptation is especially critical in an environment where society questions the need, value, and importance of long standing institutions such as bureaucratic organizations and institutions of higher education (Kellerman, 2012).

Institutions of higher education generally (Zusman, 2005), and the land grant university system (LGUS) more specifically (Lamm, Lamm, & Strickland, 2013) have been identified as organizations where change and adaptation is critical. The need for universities and their leaders to embrace change has been well established in the literature. For example, the observations Kerr and Gade (1986) made regarding universities over 30 years ago is consistent with the observations and

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recommendations with more contemporary literature (e.g. Lamm, Sapp, & Lamm, 2015). Specifically, change and crises are the norm for organizations of higher education (Zusman, 2005).

Higher education, including the LGUS, must continue to change and address several noteworthy expectation shifts (Creative Destruction, 2014). For example, there has been the need to simultaneously provide affordable education options to students while improving infrastructure, hiring and retaining talent, and increasing the number of amenities and resources available to learners (Creative Destruction, 2014). The juxtaposition of needs creates an environment of tension that organizations such as the LGUS generally struggle to adequately address without embracing meaningful change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Although there has been research into the change process (e.g. Kotter, 2012), there has been a limited amount of research specifically focused on the change process within the LGUS system (Lamm et al., 2013). However, based on Kotter's (2012) recommendations, it may be appropriate to examine organizational change from the perspective of leaders within the organization of interest. Specifically, change is typically identified and undertaken by leaders within an organization based on their access to organizational insights and external trends (Heifitz & Linsky, 2002; Kotter, 2012). Leaders within the LGUS may therefore be able to provide a unique perspective on organizational change (Fish, 2003; Lamm et al., 2013).

Priority area two of the National Research Agenda: American Association for Agricultural Education 2016 – 2020 (Roberts, 2016) addresses new technologies, practices, and products adoption decisions, and specifically begs the question, "what methods, models, and practices are most effective in leading change?" (p. 21). Consequently, a study focused on change within the LGUS from the perspective of LGUS leaders could provide valuable insights regarding creating and sustaining the organizational change needed within the LGUS to ensure it continues to exist and serve stakeholders in relevant ways.

## Theoretical Foundation

Organizational change was the theoretical foundation for this study and is a well-established field of inquiry and one with an extensive literature base (Hayes, 2014). A comprehensive review of the literature is provided followed by a conceptual mapping of theoretical models representing the theoretical lens for the inquiry.

One of the most prominent models of organizational change is the three-step model proposed by Lewin (1951). The core the model presents three main stages. The first stage is a period of time where the existing patterns are unfrozen within an organization. The unfreeze process is followed by a movement stage where change occurs. Finally, once moved the third stage is a time when new patterns are re-frozen. The model tends to be well understood because it is consistent with practical experience regarding change; however, the conceptual nature of the model is also a limitation as there is little tactical or operational direction on implementing change (Cameron & Green, 2015).

Similar to Lewin (1951), Bullock and Batten (1985) proposed a model for planned change that was both practically relatable and conceptually sound (Cameron & Green, 2015). Specifically, the Bullock and Batten (1985) model includes an initial phase for exploration. Next, there is a phase for planning to occur. Once plans are established there is the need to take action. Finally, after the action has taken place there is a period of integration where the change becomes interwoven into the fabric of the organization. The planning and action stages provide greater pragmatic insights for change to occur than Lewin's (1951) second, or move, stage (Cameron & Green, 2015).

Unlike Lewin (1951) or Bullock and Batten (1985) the Nadler and Tushman (1997) congruence model considers the internal organizational factors that provide context for organizational change. Specifically, the Nadler and Tushman (1997) model includes considerations for the work, the people, the formal organization, and the informal organization. Although the model considers the organizational context for change, it does so at a conceptual level insofar that specific characteristics or functions within the broad conceptual categories are not explicitly defined (Cameron & Green, 2015).

The Burke-Litwin (1992) organizational change model is similar to the organizational context considerations from the Nadler and Tushman (1997); however, unlike Nadler and Tushman (1997) the Burke-Litwin (1992) model includes the specific factors and functions within the organizational context. The model includes 12 distinct factors organized into two main categories. Within the transformational category the external environment, mission and strategy, leadership, and organizational culture are organized. Within the transactional category the management practices, structure, systems including policies and procedures, work unit climate, task and individual skills, motivation, and individual needs and values are organized. There is one factor shared between both categories, specifically individual and organizational performance. The Burke-Litwin (1992) model has been shown to relevant to change behaviors within the Extension service which is subsumed within the larger LGUS (Lamm, 2011).

One of the most prominent change theories within the contemporary and popular literature (Cameron & Green, 2015), as well as within agricultural education (Roberts, 2016) has been Kotter's (1995) eight-steps of change. Unlike Lewin (1951) and Bullock and Batten (1985) that remain at the conceptual level, the Kotter (1995) model included very prescriptive steps for leading change efforts. From this perspective, the Kotter (1995) model is similar to Nadler and Tushman (1997) based on the acknowledgement of the organizational context. Additionally, the Kotter (1995) model might be associated with the leadership factor within the Burke-Litwin (1992) model with the prescribed steps logically subsumed within the factor.

According to the Kotter (1995) model, there is the need for a change leader to first establish a sense of urgency around the change. Next, a powerful guiding coalition should be established to support the change. Once urgency and a coalition are established there is the need to create a vision for the change. After the vision is developed it should be communicated to those associated with, or effected, by the change. Following the communication stage, it is important to empower others to act on the communicated vision. Next, there should be a plan to create short-term wins to build momentum for the change. As short-term wins are accumulated the improvements should be consolidated and reinvested to produce more change. Finally, the new approaches should be institutionalized within the organization. The fidelity of the steps, and track record of success within organizations provides credibility to the process; however, the process can also be restrictive if there is not sufficient time or resources to complete all steps in sequence (Cameron & Green, 2015).

Similar to the eight-steps proposed by Kotter (1995), Carnall (1990) proposed a change model that tended to be leader-centric. From an organizational change perspective, the Carnall (1990) managing transitions model has three focus areas. First, transitions should be managed effectively. Second, it is important to appreciate and acknowledge organizational cultures. Third, it is necessary to manage organizational politics. The acknowledgement of the political nature of organizations is consistent with other organizational theories such as the political frame suggested by Bolman and Deal (1991) and is unique amongst the other change theories.

In addition to organization change theories that address specific process steps and sequences once change is initiated, there are other models that tend to focus on the need for change, or the conditions for change to occur. For example, the Beckhard and Harris (1987) change formula stipulates that change will only occur when level of dissatisfaction with the status quo multiplied by the desirability of the proposed change multiplied by the practicality of the change has a perceived cost less than that of not changing. The model provides clarity regarding the antecedents for change, by way of the arithmetic conditions, that are necessary for change to occur successfully (Cameron & Green, 2015).

As a supplement to the identified theories and models there are additional models that provide suggestions and organizational change insights. For example, model offered by Bridges (1991) is on managing the transitions associated with change. Specifically, change can be conceived as cyclical, with the end of one cycle serving as the start for the next. The ending stage is representative of the current state within the organization. The neutral zone is where change, and organizational transition occurs. This neutral zone is when organizations are most vulnerable because it is a departure from the known to the unknown. Eventually the change is clarified and internalized by the organization and a new beginning emerges. According to Bridges (1991) the new beginning should be grounded in the purpose behind the experienced change, a clear vision for the new organization, a well-defined and executed plan, and roles for everyone to have contributed to the change. The new beginning, once embraced by the organization, then serves as the ending state for the next change cycle. The model proposed by Bridges (1991) is less focused on the conceptual, or prescriptive, concepts associated with the change; instead it tends to highlight the disquiet that one should expect during change and the cyclical nature of change within organizations (Cameron & Green, 2015).

The ambiguity associated with change identified by Bridges (1991) is consistent with the organizational change observations provided by Senge et al. (1999) in their systemic model of change. The Senge et al. (1999) model is focused on the challenges that should be expected throughout the change process. The model suggests that change begins small and then grows. Because of the evolving nature of change, it is not possible to plan for the entire process, instead a practical and iterative approach will be more effective. Finally, any change should expect to encounter resistance and challenges. The more set-backs are expected, the less likely they are to obstruct the process.

Consistent with the themes of ambiguity and challenge in the Bridges (1991) and Senge et al. (1999) models, both Stacey (2001) and Shaw (2002) have identified the complexity associated with organizational change. Both suggest that change must be considered within a dynamic environment and persist that change is not possible to initiate within a static organization. Once change is initiated, it is not possible to confidently predict the consequences and outcomes associated. Additionally, for a leader engaged in the change process it may be difficult to objectively observe the consequences of their actions and to modify their actions accordingly. The complex responsive process (Cameron & Green, 2015), identified by Stacey (2001) and Shaw (2002), between actors and environment provides additional insights into organizational change.

Despite the insights and value associated with the organizational change literature, the specific theoretical foundation for this study was Hayes' (2014) change process theory. According to Hayes (2014), change generally follows a predictable process. First, the organization experiences an external change, or is catalyzed to act based on internal, persistent, problems or opportunities. Next, the organization recognizes the need for change and initiates the change process. Once underway, the change process includes a diagnostic stage where both the present state and future state are identified. Next, organizations plan and prepare to change. Following the planning and preparation stage the organization then implements the change. Finally, the organization must take steps to sustain the change over time.

The change process theory proposed by Hayes (2014) was selected based on the balance between high-level concepts and specific process steps. Additionally, the model provided an appropriate framework within which to synthesize organizational change theories (Creswell, 2012). A conceptual mapping of examined theories and models within the Hayes (2014) model is provided in Figure 1.

| Hayes (2014) | External or Internal Change | Recognize Need for Change | Diagnosis (Present and Future) | Plan and Prepare for Change | Implement Change | Sustain Change |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Lewin (1951) | | x | | | x | |
| Bullock & Batten (1985) | | | x | x | x | x |
| Nadler & Tushman (1997) | | | x | | | |
| Burke-Litwin (1992) | x | | x | | | x |
| Kotter (1995) | | x | | x | x | |
| Carnall (1990) | | | x | x | x | |
| Beckhard & Harris (1987) | x | x | | | | |
| Bridges (1991) | x | x | | | x | |
| Senge (1999) | | x | | x | x | |
| Stacey (2001)<br>Shaw (2002) | | | x | | x | |

1 *Figure 1*. Conceptual mapping of organizational change theories within the Hayes (2014) model.

## Purpose & Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to develop an understanding of organizational change within the LGUS from the perspective of leaders within the LGUS. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What initiates change in the LGUS?
2. What are the hindrances to change in the LGUS?
3. How does the LGUS sustain change over time?

## Methodology

### Epistemological and Theoretical Perspective

This study was undertaken from a constructionism epistemological perspective representing the "theory of knowledge embedded in the theoretical perspective and thereby in the methodology" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). Constructionism allows for individuals to create meaning collectively as it relates to an area of inquiry (Crotty, 2003). Constructivism (Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, & Hayes, 2009) was selected as the theoretical perspective for the study. The theoretical perspective provided the "philosophical stance informing the methodology… providing context for the process" (Crotty, 2003, p. 3). Within the context of this study, constructivism allowed the researchers to focus on the experiences of leaders in the LGUS and their collective insights regarding organizational change within the LGUS.

### Research Design

A generic or basic qualitative methodology was used based on the epistemological and theoretical perspective selected (Merriam, 1988). A basic qualitative methodology identifies emergent themes and patterns to describe the phenomenon of interest (Merriam, 1988). Based on recommendations from the literature (Krueger & Casey, 2000), three focus groups were conducted with representatives from three LGUS organizations; one at a large government organization – the National Institute of Food and Agriculture (NIFA), one at an 1862 institution – the University of Tennessee (UT), and one at an 1890 institution – Prairie View A&M University (PVAM). The organizations were selected as having the largest number of alumni from the LEAD21 program within their respective organizational categories.

Focus groups were chosen as the data collection method for the study based on their use within the academic literature generally (e.g. Chalofsky, 1999; Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014) and agricultural education literature more specifically (e.g. Bailey, Arnold, & Igo, 2014). A total of 28 individuals participated in the three focus groups; 10 individuals from NIFA, 10 individuals from UT, and eight individuals from PVAM. For data analysis purposes, identifying information was removed to ensure confidentiality. A minimum of three focus groups are recommended in the literature to ensure data saturation; however, the nature of the inquiry limited the reach (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Therefore, consistent with previous qualitative studies (Lamm, Sapp, & Lamm, In Press), the intent of this research was to provide insights from an exploratory perspective that would provide a foundation for future inquiry.

A 14-question moderator guide was developed based on the organizational change model proposed by Hayes (2014). The moderator guide was reviewed by a panel of experts and institutional review board approval was obtained. During the focus groups the moderator used the guide to steer the conversation; however, to elicit rich descriptions and detailed experiences, participants were encouraged to engage amongst each other and dwell on topics as appropriate. Consequently, the scope of the data collected between groups varied based on the emergent nature of the group interaction. The subsequent analysis was limited to only those thematic areas where there was consistent discussion and questioning amongst all three groups (Creswell, 2012).

LEAD21 program alumni from NIFA, UT, and PVAM were contacted by the LEAD21 program director and invited to attend. Acknowledging that not everyone would be able to attend, several time slots were offered and the one indicated as most popular was used (Creswell, 2012). All three focus groups were conducted using the Zoom videoconferencing tool based on recommendations in the literature for virtual focus groups (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). Most participants had cameras and could see the moderator and other participants; however, a few in the UT group were on conference call and unable to see others. Additionally, the focus groups were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. In addition, the moderator took notes throughout for triangulation purposes (Stewart & Shamdasani, 2014). The focus group transcriptions were used as the primary data source for the analysis.

A content analysis of the focus group transcriptions was completed to identify themes associated with the research questions. Holsti (1969) defined content analysis as a process "carried out on the basis of explicitly formulated rules and procedures" (p. 3). The content analysis process was used to thematically group the data into categories *a priori* based on the theoretical model of organizational change (Hayes, 2014). Content analysis allows for "reliable, valid inferences from qualitative data" (Krippendorff, 2013, p. 418).

Data from the focus groups were coded based on recommendations within the literature (Creswell, 2012). Specifically, the coder first listened to the recordings of each focus group independently. Next, the coder read through each focus group transcript twice to become familiar with the material. The transcripts were then imported, opened, and analyzed in the Dedoose software program (Dedoose, 2016). During the coding process, important words and phrases were identified as codes. Throughout the coding process an audit trail was maintained as themes were identified and grouped (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Following the data analysis process, the primary coder conducted a peer debrief with the other researchers on the project. Peer debriefing was conducted to review the proposed analysis and themes and mitigate the potential for bias and ensure rigor throughout the process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Mays & Pope, 1995). As a final step, member checking was completed to verify interpretation of the data was correct and consistent with the participants' intent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Specifically, findings were shared with participants through a preliminary report. Peer debriefing and member checking were conducted to provide additional rigor and trustworthiness to the study (Cresswell, 2012).

## Subjectivity Statement

In qualitative research, it is essential to recognize the bias that may exist from a researcher's previous experience and its contribution to the data analysis and interpretation. Therefore, it is important to note that at the time data were collected and analyzed the primary researcher was pursuing a Ph.D. in Leadership Development within the Department of Agricultural Education and Communication. He has a master's degree in Leadership Development from the University of Florida and a Bachelor's degree in Mechanical Engineering from Colorado State University. He worked as a program consultant for the LEAD21 program and completed the program as a participant observer in 2013. Prior to attending graduate school, the researcher was a consultant and manager with a global consulting organization where he was responsible for managing organizational change initiatives with Fortune 500 organizations. He was also influenced by his parents, who were both faculty members and administrators at a large land grant university located in the western United States.

## Results

### What Initiates Change in the LGUS

Participants were asked to describe what they believe initiates change in their institution. The primary theme participants identified was that change was usually initiated by a need, either internal or external to the organization. One participant summarized the theme when they said,

> A lot of that [change] is based on resources, or lack of resources, or having a lot of resources that don't quite make sense, and we try to make sense of them. [Organization] wide in terms of our processes is where I think change occurs because things aren't working well…so that change needs to occur.

Participants also indicated that change can be initiated by the desire to improve. One individual said, "You want to improve your process, your outcomes." A second participant added,

> I think it also begins with our failures, with our shortcomings, and with us not being satisfied with the results that we currently have. We don't want to keep doing the same thing and getting the same result, so we attempt to move in a different direction.

A second subtheme that emerged was that change is initiated at lower levels where leaders have supervisory support and are given an appropriate span of control. For example, one participant said, "change is easier at a micro level. As you work up through the organization then it certainly becomes much more challenging." A second participant said,

> …where all the real changes come from, from that grassroots level within [an organization]. It's far easier to get the critical mass so that you can implement a change, at least within that sphere of influence. Often times I think we'll find that we can leverage that in the greater organization.

A third participant indicated that support was critical to empowering change, "You have to have a supportive supervisor in order for something like that to happen, and having the benefit of somebody who tells you the program, recognizes that and gives us, the staff, some of those opportunities."

An additional subtheme emerged indicating the conditions necessary for change also included a combination of intentionality, communication and respect, and purposeful effort. At the beginning stages of the change process one participant said, "I think that one of the things that initiates change is that intent. When you can get a consensus in an organization that we need to make a change." Throughout the change process another participant described the need for communication and respect to impel the change, "I do know that respect of one another, valuing the contributions of each other, and [participant] always says being transparent, but also, the key is communicating. We can make or break anything with communication." Finally, the need to put forth the effort necessary to initiate and sustain change was stated by another participant, "I think the way that we've led change in the [organization] has been effective. We were able to do it. We were able to get buy in from leadership. It does work, but it took a lot of work." Another participant stated,

> …change is like retail politics. It's not global. It's not slogans. It's not some magic bullet solution. It's not some charismatic leader. It's groups of people putting forth the effort to individually talk to people and get the shared understandings and the decisions framed and made and things implemented. It all takes a lot of one-on-one-on-one. It's complicated.

**Hindrances to Change in the LGUS**

Participants were then asked what they believe hinders change within their organization. Overall, the dominant theme that emerged was that change within universities and large government agencies associated with the LGUS is hindered by bureaucratic inertia. One participant said, "That's where we see ourselves getting bogged down in bureaucratic, lengthy dialogue and decision making that impedes that change." A second participant provided a similar description, "At the larger, organizational level…initiating change is hard to assume you have the buy in, everybody is clear on what the change needs to be. It's the sheer management of the logistics sometimes, lack of resources."

A third participant commented on the inertia aspects of change, "If there's not a change agent to initiate that change, people will keep on in that same vein. They won't change at all, because you become accustomed to it." Another participant addressed the nuance of change in a university environment,

> I think that's systemic among a lot of institutions, especially in academia. In private industry or in business, if a product isn't selling, your clients are going to make you change, or you are going be out of business. With academia, change is not as—it's a little more subtle. It takes time to get to a certain place…We continue to do program planning around what we know and what we assume the needs are at the moment, and don't really get the kinds of response that private industry gets when something is not selling.

A second primary theme that emerged was that change has been frequently hindered by a lack of clarity and vision**.** One participant summarized the challenge saying, "one of the things I miss about where I'm at now, we don't have a good strategic plan mapped out for change. We need to make that something that we work towards." The lack of vision and strategy was noted as causing a number of other hindrances to change. For example, another participant associated lack of vision with failing to develop "a sense of urgency. I think that in many instances we fail to share a vision of how important it is to get something done."

A secondary theme that emerged was that lack of clarity can lead to confusion. One participant described the challenges associated with trying to push a change within their organization, "It has been very challenging, in pulling all of the parties together, to make sure we're all on the same page. Even the parties are not clear. They're confused in some areas regarding policy and procedures and processes." A second participant stated that lack of strategy was preventing organizational change from occurring, "We have the change that's occurring in pockets, but we're not always very good at being able to connect those to what could become or should be strategic change." One participant described how lack of clarity, or transparency, may result in a lack of trust that may then manifest into a hindrance to change. They stated,

> I think one of the biggest obstacles that we had, that we encountered was these were issues of trust. They were in within programs that the bigger issues were the trust issues between program and our financial side. There were a lot of obstacles that were erected because of the assumption that we were going to change something of someone else's, and not willing to change ourselves. That's a whole organizational mindset that you have to try and address that it's really challenging.

An additional theme was that individuals within the organization may hinder change based on fear or other motives. One participant summarized the challenge by saying, "It can be just individuals, depending on their role, within an office or department. Depending on the personality of that individual, that can be a hindrance, definitely." A second participant described some of their observations of why individuals may be a hindrance to change by saying,

> I think the biggest issue is there is a fear that they're going lose something in this. They're going lose something as a department. They're going lose autonomy. They're going to lose resources. They're going to lose control. I think it's that fear of loss that people will—they'll blow up on you and they'll not support or even work against it.

**Sustaining Change Over Time in the LGUS**

Participants were asked what steps they have taken to ensure changes they have been involved with are sustained over time. The primary theme that emerged was change is sustained and most successful based on relationships. One participant stated,

> I don't think that we can underestimate the importance of relationships in building trust and being able to move forward. Coming from an Extension background, that's always been my mantra. If we want producers to change what they do, we need to develop a relationship and trust. It doesn't matter what the change is, that's still a critical component.

A second participant noted the importance for maintaining relationships in being able to sustain change over time saying,

> Either establishing or maintaining those relationships is really important. You start to get a sense of how is this working for people. Then you can also get a sense of what's not working so well or what did you not foresee and start nipping that in the bud before it really becomes too problematic.

A second theme was that change is sustained when it has relevance. A participant identified the need for an ongoing focus on change saying, "For those activities [changes] that we know are ones that we want to continue to invest in, to grow, I think it's imperative that we capture the outputs and impacts." A second participant noted,

> [Change] has to be relevant and it has to be meeting a need. It has to be meeting the objectives that our funders and also for our stakeholders because, if not, what we're doing is irrelevant, and we certainly won't be effective.

A final subtheme that emerged was the need for ongoing communication and consistency for change to be sustained over time. For example, when describing an experience of sustaining change within their organization, a participant identified the need for "putting in the effort for consistent communication and one-on-one meetings." Another participant said, "We purposely tried to go slow. We had focus sessions. We had listening groups. We talked to external people. We tried to build some support for it." A third participant had a similar perspective when describing on ongoing change from output to outcome programming,

> The only way you can make that change happen is just to stay with it and continue to build programming around outcome programming, rather than reverting back to output programming. Just continue to emphasize that our goal is to have outcomes.

## Conclusions

The results of the study provided several insights regarding the organizational change process within the LGUS. Many of the themes that emerged from the focus groups were consist with the theories and models reviewed in the literature; however, there were multiple instances where the LGUS context provided unexpected results. The first research question was focused on what initiates change in the LGUS. The results indicated that change in the LGUS is usually initiated by a need within the organization, either internal or external. This theme is somewhat predictable given the antecedent conditions for change within almost every organizational change theory, whether the unfreezing process described by Lewin (1951) or the external environment identified by the Burke-Litwin (1992) model. Generally, a catalyst or stimuli initiates change in the LGUS. Although many changes in the LGUS may originate as a response to an external condition, a sub-theme emerged which indicated change also occurs organically or as a function of reflection or communication as proposed by Stacey (2001) or Shaw (2002).

Some change within the LGUS was initiated by the desire to improve. The desire to improve serving as a catalyst to change is noteworthy as it relates to the organizational change arithmetic proposed by Beckhard and Harris (1987). Specifically, that change will only tend to occur when the perceived cost associated with the change is less than the product of the current level of dissatisfaction multiplied by the desirability of the proposed change multiplied by the practicality of the change. Changes that originate from internal desires to improve require a commitment from organizations to both explore (Bullock & Batten, 1985) and recognize the need for change (Hayes, 2014). Additionally, internal change tends to require more fortitude and commitment to execute successfully as opposed to external pressures that tend to mandate, rather than encourage, change (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

Another theme that emerged is that change tends to be initiated at lower levels within the LGUS, specifically as levels where leaders, or change agents, have supervisory support and are given an appropriate span of control. This finding was consistent with the recommendation to start small provided by Senge et al. (1999) and addressed the formal organization (Nadler & Tushman, 1997) and structure (Burke & Litwin, 1992) considerations associated with the LGUS.

There was also acknowledgement that change within the LGUS is also dependent on several supportive conditions being in place. Specifically, the results indicated change in the LGUS required a combination of intentionality, communication and respect, and purposeful effort. The results are similar to Kotter's (1995) recommendation to establish a sense of urgency around change. The conditions for change in the LGUS are also consistent with the literature as it related to managing transitions and boundary conditions while undertaking change (Bridges, 1991) as well as taking context into consideration (Shaw, 2002; Stacey, 2001).

Participants also provided their insights regarding hindrances to change within the LGUS. The most prominent theme was that organizational change in the LGUS is hindered by bureaucratic inertia. Successful organizational change requires dealing with organizational cultures (Carnall, 1990) as well as both the formal and informal organization itself (Nadler & Tushnan, 1997). Consequentially, this result provided insight into the organizational peculiarities associated with the LGUS.

A second hindrance to organizational change in the LGUS was the general lack of clarity and vision for the change. Both Kotter (1995) and Hayes (2014) identified a vision for the desired end state as a necessary step within the change process. The results of this study confirm this recommendation. Specifically, the results indicated that a lack of clarity around organizational change can lead to confusion amongst those in the LGUS that the change will impact. Communicating a clear vision is necessary to ensure a common understanding (Kotter, 1995).

In addition to the organizational and vision-related hindrances identified, the results also indicated that specific individuals within a LGUS organization may hinder change. The results were consistent with the literature that identified organizational politics (Carnall, 1990) and people (Nadler & Tushman, 1997) as important considerations for organizational change. This result illuminated one of the contextual aspects of change within the LGUS. Specifically, the high levels of autonomy and control expected by LGUS faculty and personnel may run counter to change efforts (Fish, 2003).

The third research question centered around how the LGUS sustains change over time. The primary theme that emerged, that change is sustained and most successful based on relationships, was consistent with Kotter's (1995) recommendation to form a powerful guiding coalition. The results indicated that unlike other theoretical recommendations proposed within the literature that are intended to sustain change, relationships were identified as the most critical. This theme was further reinforced by the people aspect of change identified by Nadler and Tushman (1997).

In addition to the need for relationships to sustain change, the results of the study indicated that change in the LGUS was sustained when it had relevance. This finding was conceptually similar to the recommendation offered by Senge et al (1999) that it is important to start small and grow steadily as well as Kotter's (1995) suggestion to plan for and create short-term wins and consolidate improvements to produce more change. The intent of the theme was to ensure organizational change was relevant within the organization, not simply theoretical, or administratively.

Lastly, the final theme to emerge from the study relating to sustaining organizational change was the need for ongoing communication and consistency. The consistency aspect of the result was akin to the re-freeze stage identified by Litwin (1951). The change must be internalized and integrated into the organization; however, the only way for this to occur was through consistency. This theme also acknowledged the systems aspect of organizations, including policies and procedures, that Burke and Litwin (1999) identified. Without an adequate structure to support the change, including both procedures for communication as well as consistent application, it is unlikely organizational change will be successful.

## Implications and Recommendations

The results indicated organizational change within the LGUS shared characteristics consistent with the existing literature. However, the nature of the LGUS provided a unique context that is not specifically addressed within the existing theory base. Although the current study indicated that organizational change within the LGUS experiences many of the same challenges and opportunities associated with change elsewhere; the emphasis on identified triggers for change, supporting conditions for initiating change, hindrances to change, and supporting conditions for sustaining change are of particular importance.

To assist with the interpretation of the study results a conceptual model for organizational change in the LGUS was developed (see Figure 2). The three core components for the model (initiating change, hindrances to change, and sustaining change) were emphasized as conceptual markers within the model; however, the primary intent and value of the model were the conditions and antecedents that were related to the three core components. The recommendations and implications are thus focused on the themes surrounding the core components.

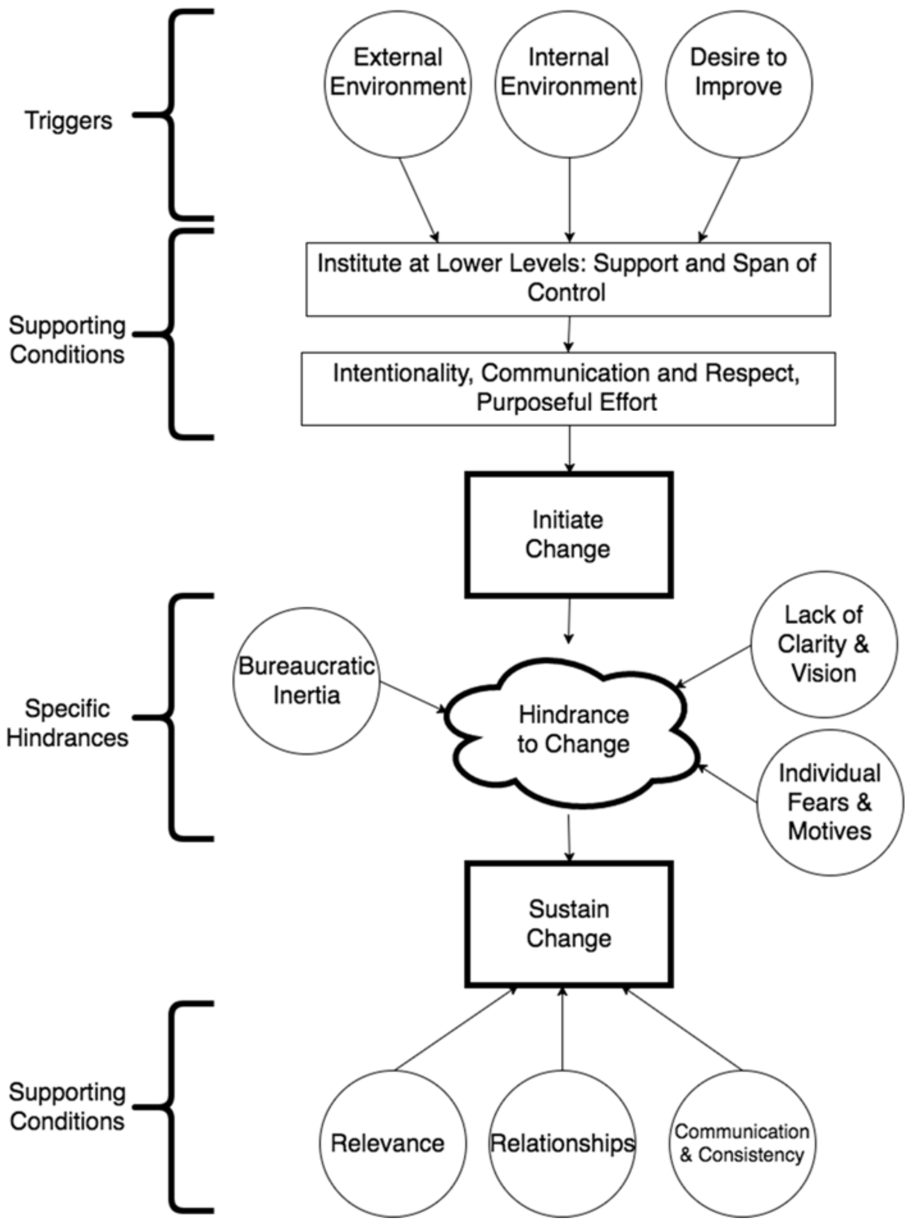


*Figure 2*. Conceptual model of organizational change in the LGUS.

The first set of recommendations and implications focused on the triggers for change within the LGUS. The results indicated that changes can originate from the internal or external environment; however, the results also found that a desire to improve can serve as a trigger for change. It is recommended that organizations within the LGUS employ a balance between proactive and reactive change. Internal or external change might be thought of as requiring a reactive change, a move necessary to address a need. However, a reactive change approach is very defensive and limits the ability to grow and pursue excellence from the desire to improve (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). The proactive nature of change cultivated through the desire to improve should also be encouraged.

The second set of recommendations are related to the supporting conditions for initiating change. The results indicated change initiated at the lower levels can be very effective. This finding is unique to the LGUS. The organizational change literature tends to indicate that change is most effective when initiated from the top down (e.g. Lewin, 1951). Therefore, the LGUS context may require a bottom up approach. It is recommended that changes within the LGUS are encouraged at lower levels within the organization, whether in a lab, a classroom, or for an Extension program. When individuals are empowered to make changes within their area of control they tend to have a higher level of commitment and resilience when approaching the change process. Change at the micro-level can then gain momentum and visibility with the possibility of affecting change at the organizational level.

In addition to changes initiated at lower levels within the LGUS, a second set of supporting conditions emerged. Specifically, organizational change in the LGUS required intentionality, communication and respect, and purposeful effort. Based on this theme it is recommended that any change efforts at the organizational level have a specific plan to address these areas. The first recommendation is that change should be done with the intention of seeing it through to completion. It is not sufficient to desire a change and then fail to provide the resources, or support, necessary to make it successful. A second recommendation is to establish a clear communication plan and to ensure the plan emphasizes the respect due to those that will be involved or affected. A third recommendation is to be purposeful in the change effort; specifically, the focus on the change should not be distracted. Maintaining focus will provide the appropriate conditions for the initiated change to have a higher likelihood for success.

The second core component of the conceptual model focuses on the hindrances to organizational change within the LGUS. There were three main themes that emerged from the study; however, the most prominent theme was that of bureaucratic inertia. Unlike for-profit organizations that are required to respond to market conditions to maintain relevance and solvency, the LGUS is further removed from market forces (Fish, 2003). It is recommended this theme be interpreted in a judgement agnostic manner, instead it is more appropriate to acknowledge the contextual realities of the LGUS and plan accordingly. Based on this finding, it is recommended that any organizational change effort within the LGUS be accompanied by a sufficient amount of time analyzing the culture of the organization and taking the time to build organizational support and buy-in. Ensuring the supporting conditions for initiating change may also help to mitigate the effects of bureaucratic inertia.

A second thematic hindrance area was the lack of clarity and vision for organizational change. The prominence of this theme within the existing literature is both noteworthy and intuitive. In order for change to be successful there must be some expected and well understood end state. Based on this theme, it is recommended that a clear vision for the organizational change be communicated frequently and consistently using multiple communication channels. Previous research has found that different audiences may prefer and assimilate information more readily from different channels (Lamm, Rumble, Carter, & Lamm, 2016).

The third theme associated with hindrances to organizational change in the LGUS referred to individual fears and motives. Maintaining consistency and predictability is a strong motive for human behavior, even if the motive is operating at the sub-conscious level (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). It is recommended that in addition to an organizational culture assessment an assessment of the political climate within the organization be conducted. Understanding the politics of the organization (including social capital, networks, and power sources) should provide both value and insights. The information obtained through this process could help to inform which key-individuals have the ability to delay or derail a proposed change. Identifying these actors and working with them initially could help mitigate the potential for both change hindrance or abandonment.

The final core component of the conceptual model is related to sustaining organizational change over time. The primary theme that emerged was the importance of relationships to sustain change. Based on this finding it is recommended that organizational change within the LGUS be completed through a consortium of individuals that are committed to seeing the change executed successfully. Additionally, it is recommended that the consortium consist of individuals from different domains and with different areas of expertise. A broad and unified network of individuals should help to maintain the vision for the change and provide the resources, from social capital to monetary support, necessary to sustain the change.

Conceptually linked to the relationships necessary to sustain change, ongoing communication and consistency was identified as an important theme. It is recommended that any change efforts are supported by frequent and transparent communication that is provided even after the change has been implemented. For example, case studies or vignettes regarding the benefits of the change at the individual level should lead to increased understanding and support for the change.

Lastly, change must continue to be relevant to be sustained over time. Based on this finding it is recommended that change be thought of as an ongoing cycle where the end of one change serves as the starting point for a new iteration of change when the old change is no longer relevant (Bridges, 1991). From this perspective, it is recommended that organizational change in the LGUS is periodically assessed and evaluated to ensure it is still relevant and appropriate.

Although the results, conclusions, and recommendations from this study are consistent with the existing organizational change literature, it is necessary to identify a number of limitations. First, the limited number of focus groups should be acknowledged. It is not possible to reach full data saturation with only three focus groups; therefore, all the associated results and recommendations should be considered exploratory. Additionally, the composition of the focus groups should be addressed. As alumni of the [Program], participants have been identified as leaders within the LGUS. Their perspective may not be consistent with all personnel with the LGUS. Nevertheless, the results of the study provided insights regarding organizational change within the LGUS, and by association have implications for departments of agricultural education and affiliated agricultural educators.

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