Incremental Vs. 'Big Bang' Change

In a study done by Balogun and Hailey (2004), different types of change were categorized as being either 'incremental,' or 'big bang.'

INCREMENTAL

They described an incremental change as being a small and 'evolutionary' process that led to adaptation.

BIG BANG

The Big Bang change was described as a revolutionary process leading ultimately to reconstruction, unfolding a picture of change that could shake up an existing infrastructure, causing it to collapse before it could be built up again.

However, some might argue that planned, deliberate changes, as an intentional systematic design to transform the way of doing things (Weick, 2000; Burnes, 2004), could be made at a much accelerated pace in a series of pre-measured and calculated changes that followed an adaptive pattern. A transformation would be the achievement of simultaneous reconstruction and adaptation.

Another study, discussing 'anticipated' and 'reactive' types of change, showed that by proactively anticipating the necessity to change, it could be made by a clearly implementable design. Reactive changes, on the other hand, could result in unpredictable and unanticipated change (Nadler and Tushman, 1990).

Anticipating change can make it easier to stay ahead of the curve and maintain pole position, in some cases. But if anticipating and making the goal of a planned change is to predict the implementation of a successful innovation, why are change projects, as Kotter (1996) comments, "… messy and full of surprises?" Perhaps one answer to this problem is found in a collaborative effort where the participation of many colleagues amounts to a more comprehensive understanding of the existing framework. By utilizing the collective knowledge gained by engaging the participation of many people, technical problems and adaptive changes can be made easier.

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