Normal Next: The Future of Change[1]
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The end state that used to be the destination in organizational change has vanished, leaving only a state of "*What's next?*" Forget the "new normal," there is only "normal next," and there is no going back. This perpetual normal next makes the imperative to scale up organizational change capacity ever more urgent.

Organizational change capacity is an organization's ability to simultaneously operate efficiently while innovating and evolving effectively to solve for problems unknown. The primary type of problem leaders must learn to solve for are what have come to be known as "wicked problems." Wicked problems are characterized by their essentially unique nature, constantly morphing requirements and their inextricably networked context that connects each potential solution to multiple consequences, mostly unintentional. In this environment, the three conditions needed to scale up organizational change capacity—speed, learning and integration—are first principles of transformation. A conceptual framework of transformation can help leaders build sensemaking organizations well positioned to navigate change and complexity. The framework I recommend, I call the *Transformation Triad* (Figure 1).

Old school organizational hierarchies are increasingly ineffective innovation engines.   They are unable to harness the speed, learning and integration needed to move from decision-making, to operations, to learning and ultimately sensemaking.   Simultaneously leaders find they need to harness the full collective creativity of their organizations and build distributed leadership networks more than ever. Collective creativity and distributed leadership networks, can produce and spread the needed unique solutions in our never ending state of normal next. Applying the conceptual transformation triad framework can help leaders gain access to that full collective creativity and sow the seeds of distributed leadership to address whatever wicked challenge they may face.

Figure 1:   The Transformation Triad can help senior leaders build sensemaking organizations. (Lang, 2019)

The Transformation Triad
Organizational change capacity has three primary dimensions: context, process, and learning. The conceptual transformation triad focuses on two of these dimensions, process and learning, to build transformation capacity no matter the context.   The transformation triad's three elements are: 1) How we think about change (mindsets), 2) How we design and build for change (frameworks), and, 3) How we talk about change (narratives).   These three elements are foundational to the dynamics of all organizational change.   They are also the levers of organizational sensemaking. This lens views the journey to transformative sensemaking from three perspectives: the Agile movement, organizational storytelling and social factors in organizational change.

Executive Agile Activists

Agile as a software development approach first took root in 2001, then quickly spread to become an organizational agility approach, and now is applied to inform social justice change movements. Agile as a methodology (e.g. SCRUM) can help teams execute more effective project management when navigating change.

Figure 2:
Agile Is a Mindset & Agile is a Behavior
(Hodgson, 2017)

However, it is agile as a mindset that holds the most promise when scaling up change capacity. The agile mindset can be particularly powerful where it matters most; at the senior executive level during times of uncertainty.

Agile activist mindsets can fuel deep leadership and staff partnerships. These partnerships are characterized by close authentic collaboration, shared goals, and accountability for both success and setbacks. They are the types of partnerships that are often the missing link to scalable change capacity and transformation success.

An agile activist mindset can help shift the traditional role of Executive Sponsor to become one of Executive Transformation Partner. Embracing the role of an Executive Transformation Partner is much deeper than a symbolic or semantic change. It is a significant behavioral change that can greatly improve the success of change and transformation initiatives and it can start with the introduction of an Agile Change Activist mindset for all senior leaders. This is not a call to introduce an Agile methodology of one sort or another, such as SCRUM, into the C-suite. That would be unwelcome at best and organizationally regressive at worst. This is a call for senior leaders to embrace the power that an agile activist mindset can have on their organization's transformation capacity and evolution toward sensemaking.

Agile activist mindsets at the senior executive level can help to do four things: 1) Reinforce focused shared goals, 2) Facilitate positive interactions and team dynamics, 3) Honor a space for uncertainty and individual voice, and, 4) Develop expectations of collaboration, experimentation, and innovation across their organizations.

Mindsets, the transformation triad's foundation, serve as mental lenses that filter the behavior of leaders. Mindsets form implicit views of the sources of outcomes, and mindsets drive behavior. Because mindsets play such a powerful role in determining behavior, mindsets are where we must start.

For example, a command and control mindset, will predictively drive commanding and controlling behavior. Conversely, agile activist mindsets can drive collaboration and nimble responsiveness to change. This can help leaders generate better starting ideas, and direct organizational energy to grow those ideas into results. Ideas, energy and results are the roots of the courageous exploration that is a hallmark of a sensemaking enterprise.

Who will be the leaders able to generate novel, effective solutions to the cascading challenges in our normal next? Which organizations will navigate wicked problems to the benefit of the collective good? My money's on those leaders with the courage to push past comfort zones of aloofness, avoidance, and leading at arm's length. The courageous leaders willing to connect in deep partnership with those closest to wicked problems. The leaders willing and able to enter the contact sport that is true transformation leadership. They will lead sensemaking organizations making positive impact and real progress. Get in the game.