Pilots for change: exploring organisational change through distributed leadership

Steve Kempster
Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University, Lancaster, UK
Malcolm Higgs
School of Management, Southampton University, Southampton, UK, and
Tobias Wuerz
*Horvath and Partners, Düsseldorf, Germany and
Lancaster University Management School, Lancaster University,
Lancaster, UK*

Abstract

Purpose – Little is known about how and why pilots are useful in the context of organisational change. There has similarly been little attention to processes of distributed leadership in organisational change. The purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretical argument relating to how key aspects shaping organisational change can be addressed by distributed change leadership through the mechanism of pilots.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper contribution is to review extant literature on change management and distributed leadership to build a model of distributed change leadership.

Findings – The paper outlines how the model of distributed change leadership can be applied through a pilot strategy to help engender commitment and learning, as well as contextualising the change to cope with the complexities of the situation.

Practical implications – The paper concludes with a discussion on the opportunities distributed leadership through pilots can bring to the effectiveness of organisational change interventions. The paper identifies a series of research propositions to help guide future directions for research. Finally the paper explores practical implications of the suggestions.

Originality/value – There is an absence of discussion on distributed leadership within the context of change management. Further the mechanism of pilots shaped by distributed leadership has not been explored. This paper is intended to provide a stimulus for exploring this important area in terms of shaping thinking and designs for organisational change to enhance effectiveness.

Keywords Distributed leadership, Pilots, Planned, Political and emergent change

Paper type Conceptual paper

Introduction

The implementation of pilot processes is not common in organisational change management. As a corollary little is known about how and why pilots could be useful to enhanced efficacy of organisational change. Similarly little attention has been given to processes of distributed leadership in organisational change. The purpose of this paper is to develop a theoretical argument relating to how the key "dynamics of change management" can be integrated for enhanced efficacy by distributed change leadership through the mechanism of pilots.

There is considerable discussion suggesting that organisations are responding to the challenges of change more and more frequently. A longitudinal study of 50 British firms has shown that the pace at which organisations are changing is accelerating (Whittington and Mayer, 2002). Although organisations seek to address both the

external challenges and the development of internal capabilities (Barney, 2001) through internal changes, the success rate of the change programmes launched within organisations is poor, varying in failure between 70 and 90 per cent (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008; Higgs and Rowland, 2005).

In engineering, pilots are widely used to detect failures of new developments and to increase the success rate of the launch of a new product or service. In psychological research the use of pilots for controlled experiments has been thoroughly developed over many years (Orne, 1962). However, little work has transferred to understanding the role of pilots within organisational change. This is a much overlooked phenomenon. It arguably should be capable of being applied within organisations to reduce the failure rate of change programmes. We explore how pilots could be applied with particular attention to the notion of distributed leadership. Distributed leadership places emphasis on a relational process that draws on many being involved with leadership rather than the sole individual leader; more than the formal property of the individual leader, but rather embracing informal and emergent aspects alongside formal roles (Senior and Fleming, 2006, p. 268). Johnson-Cramer *et al.* (2003) have highlighted the importance of drawing together the "change dynamics" of political change, emergent change, planned change and learning and innovation if effectiveness of change initiatives are to be enhanced. Two related questions address this issue and are central to this paper: How can the "change dynamics" of rational planning, politics and emergence be drawn together effectively? What is the appropriate leadership approach to draw these dynamics together? We will argue that the concept of distributed leadership through piloting change may constitute a significant method to do this and as a consequence increase the success rate of organisational change programmes.

The extant literature on organisational change management has recognised the potential of pilots as a tool for change management (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008; Kanter *et al.*, 1992; Higgs and Rowland, 2005). Yet discussions on the use of pilots in change management are limited. Searching "pilots and change management" in Google Scholar generated links to themes regarding environmental sustainability and understandably research on cockpit design and pilots! Searching "pilot sites and change management" through up discussions on lean management and sustainability: in essence a dearth of exploration and discussion of pilots in the field of change management.

Prominent change management texts are also limited in discussion. For example, Senior and Fleming (2006), Burnes (2009) and Kotter (1995, 1996) do not mention pilots, Carnall (2007) refers to the use of pilots twice (pp. 48, 156) as "techniques" linked with "breakthrough teams" (p. 48), or mentioned as "part of the process" in the context of discussing leadership. No other comments are developed and this limited discussion is most prevalent in other texts. Hayes (2002) refers to pilots in terms of the work of Balogun and Hope Hailey (2008) but only cite their work. Balogun and Hope Hailey (2008) explicitly develop the importance of pilots under the notion of "start points" (p. 33) but the discussion is not extensive. Although not referring to pilots explicitly, Higgs and Rowland (2005) identify the importance of emergent experimental network-based action that appeared to provide successful change management when guided by planned frameworks (p. 145). They showed strong evidence through interviews with managers of the importance of experimentation. As discussed earlier, peer reviewed articles are very light on the ground in terms of examining the usefulness of pilots to change management. The few (and this is very few)

examinations of pilots in change management are limited to non-refereed editorials (see e.g. Polaniecki, 2006; Wolfberg and Stumborg, 2007).

Thus the concept of pilots as a mechanism for organisational change appears to be largely limited to anecdotal comments. Is the dearth of examination in both practitioner and academic journals a consequence of the limited value of pilots? Or simply that attention has not been brought to the concept? Or does the concept of pilots as a mechanism for organisational change lack an underpinning supportive theoretical structure to encourage debate and exploration? This paper addresses these three questions through our central purpose to provide a theoretical foundation for the use of pilots within change connected with notions of distributed leadership.

We first identify the key areas affecting change management – what we call the "dynamics of change management". Such dynamics reflect planned change, emergent change, political dynamics within change, along with addressing resistance, participation and commitment as well as learning. The difficulty of potentially integrating such concepts is arguably a dominant cause for limited success in change interventions. Johnson-Cramer et al. (2003) argue that for effective change management to occur change management needs to be able to draw upon each in a complementary manner. We then outline the notion of distributed leadership as having significant potential to enable this elusive complementarity. We review debates on the manifestation of this form of leadership in organisational contexts. A synthesis suggests a hybrid or blended version of distributed leadership as most suitable to embrace the preceding discussion on integrating the dynamics of change management. Subsequently we propose a theoretical processual model for distributed change leadership through pilots. We illustrate how this model integrates the dynamics of change management. Finally we outline research opportunities and organisational change implications in terms of improving success rate of change management interventions and explore the potential implications of implementing distributed change leadership through pilots.

Prior to examining the dynamics of change management we define what we mean by a pilot. In this paper, we define a change management pilot as a mechanism to facilitate sociological and psychological processes of change through the act of designing, experimenting and implementing localised structural or operational changes. The definition of distributed leadership will be outlined shortly.

The dynamics of change management

Change management as an academic discipline is arguably highly fragmented and offers a multitude of partly competing, partly complementary theories and models (By, 2005; Whelan-Berry and Somerville, 2010). We suggest that debates in change management can be summarised into the following three perspectives: rationally planned change management (Kotter, 1995; Beer and Nohria, 2000; Higgs and Rowland, 2005); politically governed change management (Buchanan and Badham, 1999) and emergent, bottom-up based change management (Stace and Dunphy, 1998; Higgs and Rowland, 2005) – the last embraces notions of individual and team-based learning that emerges within continuous change. We provide a brief review of each perspective to illustrate the theoretical tension of competing dynamics of change. We emphasise that these are not mutually exclusive. Rather we suggest that an additional dynamic is required to become mutually complementary: namely distributed change leadership through pilots.

Perspective no. 1: rational planning of change management
Rational planning is perceived to be built around a temporal, three tiered understanding of organisational change: first, an understanding of the organisational current state; second, identifying where the organisation wants to be (the future state); and third, design the transition state (Beckhard and Harris, 1987). The transition is understood as a discontinuous step change (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008) that moves the organisation from one state of quasi-stable equilibrium to another (Lewin, 1964). The change can be and needs to be planned and the process of planning is assumed as being rational (Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008; Kotter, 1995). That does not mean that power and diverging interests are overlooked, but rather seen as contingencies to be incorporated into planning in order to achieve the identified future state.

The variety of differing approaches within the planned perspective can be distinguished by their degree of context-sensitivity regarding the design of the transition towards the future state of the firm. Through seven in-depth longitudinal case studies Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) identified that "one-fits-all" approaches are not applicable to all situations. The context sensitivity was recognised by Lewin (1967, p. 215) where unfreezing, moving and refreezing "may involve quite different problems in different cases" (see Burnes, 2004, for a review of Lewin's work and the applicability of this to both planned and emergent change). Paradoxically Lewin's recognition of complexity is captured in Weick's (1995) reversal of Lewin's model where the three phases are: "freeze – study the complex system at a point in time; adjust – encourage and stimulate adjustments to achieve necessary changes; and unfreeze – allow the system to continue functioning having made the necessary adjustments" (Higgs and Rowland, 2005, p. 125). This is a significant point that will be encapsulated in the discussion to follow on political and emergent change and the role of pilots in change.

A general criticism of the effectiveness of planned theories is that organisations continuously change and rarely reflect a state of quasi-stable equilibrium (see e.g. Burnes, 2009; Senior and Fleming, 2006). Further, there are severe limitations on the capability of "change agents" to process the information needed for a rational decision (for bounded rationality see Buchanan and Huczynski, 2004; and also Quinn, 1980). Finally, there is no obvious reason why the decision and design process of a change programme should be made exempt from the influences of power, politics and self-interests (Dawson, 2003). For example, Johnson-Cramer *et al.* (2003) outline an argument for purposive change management. They suggest that "organizations can enhance the likelihood of purposive change by creating more aligned and coherent changes and by shaping the context into which these design elements are introduced" (p. 1868).

Sitting within the planned perspective Balogun and Hope Hailey (2008, pp. 33-35) are among the few that explicitly mention "pilots" as a tactical choice for change management. These authors do not examine how pilots can mitigate some of the concerns associated with the planned perspective. Pilots can embrace the planned and organised sense of top-down and formally strategically driven change orientation. Rather this sense of institutional need and legitimatisation of the need for change is most helpful when addressing divergent interests and conflicts. A pilot can be the structure through which the plans become realised. Importantly though a pilot mechanism can embrace the inevitable divergent views of political processes.

Perspective no. 2: politically governed change management
As an alternative to the "*n*-step" (Dawson, 2003, p. 82) approaches of Kanter *et al.* (1992) and Kotter (1995), organisational change management is anchored to a focus on

the interests, conflicts and the power of the individuals within the organisation (Dawson, 1994, 2003; Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991; Wilson, 1992). While the planned perspective community propose a rational analysis of the environment as a solution in order to be able to develop an effective change design (see e.g. Balogun and Hope Hailey, 2008), Pettigrew and Whipp (1991) are sceptical about the viability of this recommended rational design and decision process.

For the proponents of the political approach, the decision-making process of individuals and of organisations is far from being linear, objectively rational or aligned with the needs of the organisation (Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991). On the individual level, experiences and routines often quickly replace information gathering and a conscious decision process. While a new manager or change agent for instance may try to understand her/his environment in order to derive a considered solution, an experienced manager often derives a solution to a given problem on the basis of his former politically orientated experience (Beer and Nohria, 2000; Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Miller, 1993). This, together with the impact of personal interests and conflicts (Morgan, 1998) leads to different perceptions of the change context and accordingly to different beliefs about a suitable change design (Buchanan and Badham, 1999). The diversity of individual decisions further increases when the organisation is facing an "out-of-ordinary" situation (Wilson *et al.*, 1986). In essence, the political perspective perceives a messy, untidy change process in which all people involved try to push their view forward by blocking other ideas and compromising with third parties (see e.g. Ford, 2006). It follows that the change design is a subject of negotiation and politics instead of being a result of a pure rational analysis of contingency factors (see Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Saka, 2003).

Criticism of this political approach to change management is first levelled at its relative slowness in the context of organisational needs and would be not able to realise emergent opportunities or to cope with emergent problems (Butcher and Atkinson, 2000). A second point of criticism deals with the implicitly accepted imbalance between politically more skilled and less skilled professions or departments in an organisation thereby distorting change towards the most powerful (Townley, 1993).

A pilot approach may be able to blend rational planning analysis with political diversity. Quinn (1980, p. 10) briefly mentions pilots in terms of "pockets of commitment" in the political process. Balogun and Hope Hailey (2008, pp. 29-31) place the use of pilots as a design choice that appears to implicitly allow for the blending of interests through the political process evolving around planned approaches. If a change is perceived to inevitably create "winners and losers" in terms of conflicts or interests and such are resolved through power (Morgan, 1998), the political process is an ever present inevitable dynamic that a pilot can respond to. Pilots, by their very nature as a testing ground, seek to respond to the flux of events and enable the pulse and complexity of organisational reality to be inculcated in a way that a strictly planned top-down and rational approach can simply not deliver (Buchanan and Badham, 1999; Littler *et al.*, 2003; Quinn, 1980; Saka, 2003). The embracing of divergent views as part of the pilot mechanism can be interpreted within notions of distributed leadership – a collective process of sense making. Not always harmonious and often manifest with conflict. Yet blending planned with political provides a sense of cohesion and direction to the sense-making process. We suggest that the institutionally recognised and legitimised pilot guides collective sense making that enables change to become grounded in the political complexity of the organisational context. Further such distributed sense making provides the opportunity for emergence and learning.

Perspective no. 3: emergent and bottom-up oriented change management
As response to the poor success rate of planned change programmes (Butcher
and Atkinson, 2000) state a failure rate of above 70 per cent; similar with Higgs and
Rowland (2005) a "new" approach for "effective corporate renewal" (Beer and Nohria,
2000, p. 158) was proposed: namely the notion of emergence and "bottom-up". The
proponents of this approach build on criticism of the rational, planned approach and
anticipate that senior management is not able to know the challenges and appropriate
answers for the detailed contextualised issues within each part of the organisation (Beer
and Nohria, 2000; Page *et al.*, 2008). They also see an incremental, politically influenced
but centrally steered change management approach as insufficient to realise effective
change. Butcher and Atkinson (2000) argue that each kind of centrally steered decision
process restricts the capacity to respond to a fast changing environment. Higgs and
Rowland (2005) place emphasis to the systemic nature in which change occurs. Building
on the work of Stacey (1996), Shaw (1997) and Wheatley (2006), they suggest that top-
down programmatic change is limited to the extent that it cannot embrace systemic
contextualised differences. Rather, stories of change by informants described a reality of
"somewhat unstructured and messy activities and interventions" (Higgs and Rowland,
2005, p. 145); responding systemically and politically to the situation as it occurred.

The change management approach suggested by Beer and Nohria (2000) views the
starting point for effective organisational change at the outer edges of the firm with
front-line employees being empowered to change or eliminate what is hindering them
and to create ways to enhance the organisation (Beer and Nohria, 2000). Since the
resulting small, pragmatic changes are directly rooted in the day-to-day operational
processes, an effective implementation is argued to be more likely than in organisation
wide top-down programmes (Butcher and Atkinson, 2000; similarly argued in Beer and
Nohria, 2000). Furthermore Higgs and Rowland (2005) argue that, due to the
complexity and interrelatedness of organisational systems, such effective changes can
spread rapidly throughout the organisation.

If an organisation is structured to enable emergent, bottom-up change, Beer *et al.*
argue that the leadership task of the senior management is to facilitate the emerging
changes: making successful "pockets" visible to the whole organisation and providing
resources for local change agents (Beer and Nohria, 2000; similarly argued in Saka, 2003).
Heifetz and Laurie (1997) suggest senior managers need to regulate the pressure on the
organisation to change. In this way the critical task of senior leadership is to periodically
align the corporate structure and direction to the newly emerged practices (Beer and
Nohria, 2000). The debate on emergence and localness speaks to the change task being
dispersed throughout the organisation. As such it poses questions on the nature of
the form of leadership relevant to enable this local and contextualised participative
activity to occur. This different form of leadership has its accent on localised learning –
understanding, designing and experimenting (Rowland and Higgs, 2008).

Embracing emergent change realities within an organised structure resonates with
the design of a pilot process if there is an acceptance that the top-down plan will
inevitably be modified to suit local realities. We suggest that such local realities cannot
be designed into the pilot from the beginning. This is too complex and arguably
unknown. However, the importance of strategic alignment and legitimisation of the
change strategy to embrace the political change dynamic gives weight to the need for
a planned approach to the objectives and purpose of the initial pilot. Yet the unfolding
movement of the pilot to local contexts seeks to incorporate a learning dynamic
alongside the collective engagement.

The learning from experiments lies at the heart of the practice of pilots. Pilots have been utilised in a variety of disciplines such as science, engineering, project management and IT. Common to all of the above is the necessity to learn about the technical capability of the planned concept in practice. The experimental nature of the pilot places emphasis on learning. The process of learning may not only improve the practical and local applicability of the change intervention towards desired goals and plans, but it has the potential to catalyse commitment through involvement (Higgs and Rowland, 2005; Stacey, 1996). The importance of commitment and involvement has been argued as a cornerstone to change management as exulted, for example, by Kanter (1984), Kotter (1996) and Pendelbury *et al.* (1998). Should such commitment and shared ownership occur alongside the learning from re-designing the pilot to the local context then the issues of resistance, so commonly debated within prescribed *n*-step remedies, may be greatly mitigated.

In search of a synthesis of the three perspectives
The three different perspectives on organisational change management are often presented as mutually exclusive. The rational planning group recommends certain "recipes" and a rigorous examination of the environment in order to effectively bring the organisation from one state to another: discontinuous steps leading from one quasi-stable period to another. The proponents of the political perspective argue against linearity and understand organisational change as an incremental process that inevitably twists and turns influenced by ever changing interests, conflicts and power. Through the perspective of emergent change the flux of events and ideas occur from the roots of the organisation. Such change cannot be effectively planned from the top of the organisation.

Each approach to change management has its specific limitations and its strengths. Using practices from only one perspective limits the potential contribution the other perspectives can offer (Johnson-Cramer *et al.*, 2003). The benefits of planning, with strong clear top-down leadership, responsive to political interests that drawing on broad constituencies of support throughout the organisation, alongside the engagement of local participation in design, testing and implementation, is arguably the change management panacea. After all Kotter's (1995, 1996) important contribution with the prescribed "8 steps" has strong resonance with this. Yet the comparison to Kotter's work captures the essence of our argument. It is a prescription for leadership. A prescription that draws on underpinning conceptualisation of change dynamics, but draws on essentialist notions of leadership: a focus on the leader to drive forward the anticipated change – a mythical sacred model (Grint, 2010). We wish to suggest connecting the change dynamics to new emerging debates in leadership studies: namely leadership as a process within the leader-follower relationship (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Within this conceptualisation of leadership we situate distributed leadership. It offers a very different orientation to change management, particularly if enabled through the mechanism of a pilot.

Distributed leadership
Assuming an ontology of leadership as focusing on "leader-follower" relations suggests a broader "examination [than] individual attributes alone" (Uhl-Bien, 2006, p. 671). Within the context of distributed leadership the relational focus needs to embrace a model of leadership that is an "emergent property of a group or network of interacting individuals working with an openness of boundaries […] [and]

the varieties of expertise are distributed across the many, not the few" (Bennet *et al.*, 2003, p. 7).

Fundamental to the notion of distributed leadership is a systemic perspective – viewing individual leader agency within relational networked activity (Ross *et al.*, 2005). In this way Gronn's (2002) argument for a recognition of the limitations of relying on one person as an expert on all matters consequently necessitates a shift in leadership conceptualisation towards what Thorpe *et al.* (2008) suggest as "collaborative and reciprocal relationships" (p. 38). The important context that both Gronn and Thorpe *et al.* address is the socially imbued notion of the heroic leader. The work of the late James Meindl (1995) has done much to bring critical attention to the social historicism of leadership. Captured in the notion of the "romance of leadership" Meindl (1995) sought to "loosen the traditional assumptions about the significance of leaders to leadership" (p. 330). Such loosening is difficult to achieve because of its questioning of deeply rooted implicit theories of leadership that draw on taken-for-granted assumptions. Grint (2010) captures the essence of these assumptions with his notion of the sacredness of leadership. Followers look to leaders who "offer certainty, identity, and absolution from guilt and anxiety" (Grint, 2010, p. 100). The sacred relates to existential desires by followers for individualistic, heroic leader identities. It is this reified sacredness that Kotter (1996), for example, assumes as a foundation to his thesis of change leadership.

These socially constructed notions of the romantic and heroic leader role are prevalent in writings on change management. An axiom that has resonated in our teaching and consulting practice in change management relates to the need of followers for strong leadership in a crisis or more broadly ambiguous and uncertain situations which typically characterise change. Thus to assume a distributed approach that is disconnected to deeply imbued follower (and leader) expectations is likely to remain merely a theoretical proposition.

This proposition has been explored in the empirical work of Collinson and Collinson (2009). Examining leadership practices within the further education sector they showed that despite considerable attention and advocacy for a distributed approach to leadership – an approach that at face value resonated with espoused values within the educational context – there was a desire for what Collinson and Collinson (2009) described as blended leadership: followers sought both certainty of unambiguous top-down direction and vision linked with participative, collaborative and networked local activity. This empirical finding also connects with Gronn's (2009) reflections on distributed leadership. His advice was to suggest a hybrid form of distributed leadership: "not the case of either or but that both leadership understandings, individual and collective count" (p. 383). Work by Rowland and Higgs (2008), in a study of change leaders in 33 organisations, provides further support for this in a change context. Furthermore, they identified that the reliance on "heroic" views of leadership impacted adversely on the success of a change.

This emerging pragmatic conceptualisation of distributed leadership is central to our argument in terms of both top-down and bottom-up leadership. A synthesis is encapsulated by Parry and Bryman (2006) as "an emergent property of a social system, in which 'leaders' and 'followers' share in the process of enacting leadership […] [and] effective leadership depends upon multiple leaders for decision-making and action-taking" (p. 455). The key aspects we wish to give emphasis to are: an emergent and systemic relationship; multiple leaders – implicit in this is our assumption at all levels; decision making and action taking – our assumption here is increasing

localisation. Drawn together Cope *et al.* (2011) suggest distributed leadership can be seen "in terms of an 'organizing' activity anchored in a wide process of social influence that is not the exclusive function of a designated leader" (p. 275).

Distributed change leadership through pilots: connecting the change management dynamics

Building from the above we suggest that distributed leadership may be significant for the success of organisational change management. We have outlined a theoretical framework that captures a systemic interconnected model of distributed change leadership. This is shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 draws on the three dynamics of change management. We connect these to enable an emergent whole, rather than see them as competing perspectives. On each of the three connecting lines between the three dynamics we have situated the important aspects that become enabled through the use of pilots. What we seek to show then is an emergent whole that is composed of four interconnected sub-triangles (or four interconnected subsystems):

(1) The central triangle (system) is the pilot mechanism. This enables the other three triangles (systems) to occur.

(2) Rationale top-down planning triangle (system).

(3) Emergent/bottom-up triangle (system) – this incorporates learning.

(4) Politically governed triangle (system).

Returning to the central triangle, the first and subsequent pilots require careful consideration to enable integration of the whole system. It is through the pilot catalyst that we suggest distributed change leadership would become manifest drawing on the change dynamics.

We place emphasis to the notion of a sequencing of pilots. The dynamic of a sequential process enables testing, learning and involvement. Testing in terms of local adaptation of the change design to allow for local nuance; learning in terms of both transferring previous learning and to capture and incorporate ideas emerging from different contexts; and involvement in terms of engaging people in participating in the
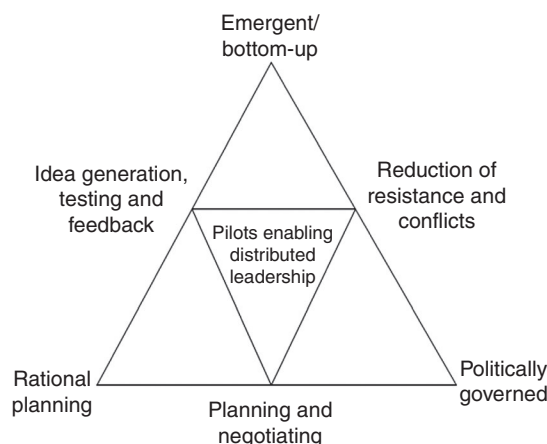

Figure 1.
Dimensions of distributed change leadership through pilots

process – lowering resistance through shared ownership of the change design relevant to the locality. In this way sequencing pilots rather than a one-off singular pilot supports an effective adaptation of the top-down change programme to different local needs through bottom-up engagement while the overall strategy of the change is maintained. Thus the notion of successive pilots provides for continual application of the three dynamics of change management. We reflect this pilot sequencing linked to the three change dynamics in Figure 2.

The trigger for a pilot arguably comes from the rational and/or the political approach to change management; a sense of political and powerful voices as a consensus of the need for change. Through planning and negotiation the circumstances of the pilot are decided. The test results, namely the arguments for and against the change and emergent ideas, are evaluated and the success or failure of the pilot is communicated. It is at this stage where the different perspectives are connected. The iterative piloting on different organisational levels increases the degree of acceptance of the change gained through pilots. Buchanan *et al.* (2005) have shown that managers at all levels in an organisation wish to explicitly see decisions and actions legitimised by alignment with a top-down change programme. This is an important dynamic to enable rather than frustrate the distribution of idea generation, decisions and action at the local level. The notion of localised and simplified echoes the work of Nutt (2004). Nutt argues that organisational change design should seek to embrace simplification and devolution – developing the notion of de-development. The mechanism of pilots appears to be a useful vehicle for realisation of such devolution set within a structure and responds to Nutt's (2004) call for implementation
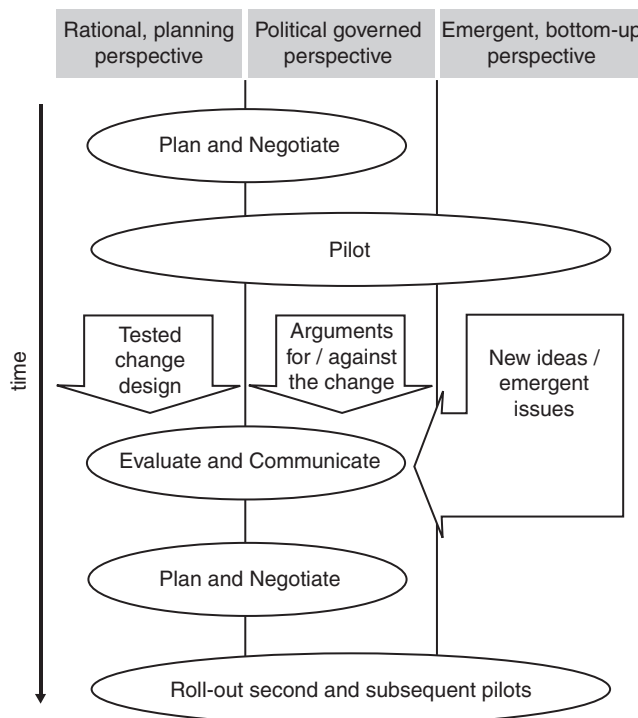

Figure 2.
Pilots creating
complementary
change dynamics

processes (p. 1,100). The process shown in Figure 2 allows for the development of trust (identified as important to change management (Coleman, 1990). This is engendered through greater distributed engagement and ownership.

Interrelated with learning and support is the incorporation of emergent ideas. A purely top-down planned change can be argued to face difficulties of implementation as a consequence of being unable to appreciate or embrace the complexity of the context in which the change is to occur (Bloodgood and Morrow, 2003). Tyrrall and Parker (2005) illustrate through their study of change in British Rail the difficulty of communications and control from top-down structures (p. 518). We argue that the absorption of new ideas through distributed supportive and legitimised participation of a pilot approach at a local level can stimulate a learning culture and associated commitment towards the change. This strongly reflects the findings of Jones *et al.* (2005) that showed that readiness to change and success of change initiatives was greatly enhanced in contexts of strong human relations. We suggest that such contexts are engendered by distributed change leadership through pilots.

Our purpose in this paper has been to explore how to enable complementarity of the change dynamics. We have argued that distributed leadership alongside the mechanism of pilots to be an important catalyst in change management. There is both limited extant understanding of change through pilots and certainly, to our knowledge, there has been no discussion on linking notions of distributed leadership with organisational change management. Similarly no discussions have drawn together distributed leadership with change through the mechanism of pilots. Our frameworks in Figures 1 and 2 provide such integration and conceptualisation of the notion of distributed change leadership through pilots.

Conclusion
At the outset of this paper we drew attention to the statement by Johnson-Cramer *et al.* (2003) who argue that effective change management needs to be able to draw upon each of the three perspectives of rational change, politically shaped change and emergent change. Our contribution has been to reframe these three perspectives; away from a sense of competing interpretations and towards a sense of complementarity. In this way we have addressed the question that frames this paper: how can the change dynamics of rational planning, politics and emergence be drawn together effectively? We have achieved this through our suggested theoretical framework of distributed change leadership through pilots captured in Figures 1 and 2. An aspect we seek to make salient is that a pilot creates the opportunity for distributed leadership and distributed leadership enables pilots to create successful change: in a sense two sides of the same coin.

In light of our theoretical argument we suggest a number of areas for future research linked to the following two propositions:

P1. Distributed change leadership enables planned, emergent and political change to be executed in a complementary manner.

P2. Implementing change through the use of pilots creates the context to enable the effective emergence of distributed leadership.

Research is required to explore the manifestation of distributed leadership within particular contexts. A number of questions relate to this research agenda. For example,

are there a variety of forms of distributed change leadership? How does context enable
or disable the emergence of distributed leadership? Can distributed change leadership
occur without the mechanism of pilots? In essence our proposition requires testing
in a variety of ways. Such methods might reflect designing an intervention in line with
our process outlined in Figure 2 and examining the journey of the implementation.
For example, exploring how, within the organisational context, top-down planned
leadership connects with political interactions? How are pilot mechanisms designed in
light of these interactions? How do local settings become involved in the pilot in terms
of design, testing and learning? How does local leadership become enabled and what
does this leadership look like? How does this leadership within the pilot address issues
of resistance? How does the emergent ideas and learning from the pilot become
transferred? To address these exploratory questions organisationally based case
studies seem a most appropriate method to provide insights into the processes and
interactions that form the basis for distributed change leadership.

Alternative to testing the above questions a series of cases could seek to examine
current practices of using pilots within organisational change as an explanatory
approach. Focusing on a grounded theory approach (Kempster and Parry, 2011) each
case could be explored to explain what has occurred in particular contexts. Such
grounded theories can be compared to our suggested theoretical framework from
which a revised (abductive) theory or new (retroductive) theory can be developed. We
have no doubts that aspects of planned top-down change alongside politics, emergence
and learning dynamics will be present. However, the nature of how they inter-relate
and the form of effective leadership in this change context is more equivocal. The
recent work of Harris (2012) is illuminating in this respect. Addressing the context of
school principal leadership Harris (2012) outlines evidence that schools who are
successful have redesigned and restructured so that leadership can be more widely
shared and spread. The redesign "connects to motivation and learning resulting,
potentially, in improved organisational outcomes" (p. 13). It is not clear in this research
what the mechanisms for enabling distributed leadership were within the change
initiative. However, the process described of "redesign" appears to have enabled the
manifestation of distributed leadership. It may be that rather than formal pilots an
informal or even metaphoric pilot process occurred. Researching the nature of pilots –
formal and informal – may reveal that much change management practice activity
does occur through pilots and researchers have not been attuned to this and made
visible this practice.

The practical implications described above of improved organisational outcomes in
the educational context explicitly illustrate considerable potential of applying our
argument for distributed change leadership through pilots. First, we would suggest
enhanced motivation and reduced resistance could be anticipated. Second, the focus
of the change can be enhanced and refined for applicability in a variety of local
contexts through learning and innovation. Third, a sense of strategic alignment
to organisational needs through integrated cohesion that is guided by a legitimate
top-down process. Harris (2012) has shown, in the school context that distributed
leadership appears to lead to organisational success. So a distributed change
leadership approach through pilots would seem most useful. However, in practical
terms many issues arise. For example, is the organisational culture and leadership
practice sympathetic to such an orientation? If power is needed to be distributed away
from central control is this acceptable? More questions are likely to be raised about the
change purpose and design requiring greater depth of understanding of the change.

There is likely to be a slower pace of change to enable successive pilots to occur and for learning to be adapted into the change process. So in practical terms there may be many issues that the application of distributed change leadership through pilots throws up that needs careful and thoughtful consideration.

The need for enhancing the effectiveness of change interventions is unequivocal. We suggest that it is the lack of attention into how to address the competitive relationship between the change dynamics that has had significant impact on intervention effectiveness. We have suggested the notion of distributed change leadership as having, in theory, potential to give insight into how the change dynamics can be complementary (shown in Figure 1). We have outlined a processual view of how distributed change leadership through pilots can occur (shown in Figure 2). The need for empirical testing is essential and we have outlined ideas for future research in this regard.

There is a dearth of discussion on the value and application of pilots in processes of organisational change management. Similarly there is very limited discussion on the notion of distributed leadership in organisational change. We hope this paper may stimulate attention to both of these areas in order to help advance leadership of change and enhance the design and implementation of change interventions for greater success.

References

Balogun, J. and Hope Hailey, V. (2008), *Exploring Strategic Change*, 3rd ed., Pearson Education Ltd, Harlow.

Barney, J. (2001), "Is the resource-based 'view' a useful perspective for strategic management research? Yes", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 26 No. 1, pp. 41-56.

Beckhard, R. and Harris, R.T. (1987), *Organizational Transitions: Managing Complex Change*, 2nd ed., Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.

Beer, M. and Nohria, N. (2000), "Cracking the code of change", *Harvard Business Review*, June-July, pp. 133-141.

Bennet, N., Wise, C., Woods, P. and Harvey, J.A. (2003), *Distributed Leadership: A Review of Literature*, National College of School Leadership, Nottingham.

Bloodgood, J.M. and Morrow, J.L. Jr (2003), "Strategic organizational change: exploring the roles of environmental structure, internal conscious awareness and knowledge", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 7, pp. 1761-1782.

Buchanan, D. and Badham, R. (1999), "Politics and organizational change: the lived experience", *Human Relations*, Vol. 52 No. 5, pp. 609-629.

Buchanan, D. and Huczynski, A. (2004), *Organizational Behaviour*, 5th ed., Pearson Education, Essex.

Buchanan, D. Fitzgerald, L., Ketley, D., Gollop, R., Jones, J.L., Saint Lamont, S., Neath, A. and Whitby, E. (2005), "No going back: a review of the literature on sustaining organizational change", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 7, pp. 189-205.

Burnes, B. (2004), "Kurt Lewin and the planned approach to change: a re-appraisal", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 977-1002.

Burnes, B. (2009), *Managing Change: A Strategic Approach to Organisational Dynamics*, 5th ed., FT Prentice Hall, London.

Butcher, D. and Atkinson, S. (2000), "The bottom-up principle", *Management Review*, Vol. 89 No. 1, pp. 48-53.

By, R.T. (2005), "Organisational change management: a critical review", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 5 No. 4, pp. 369-380.

Carnall, C. (2007), *Managing Change in Organizations*, 5th ed., FT Prentice Hall, London.

Coleman, J.S. (1990), *Foundations of Social Theory*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA.

Collinson, D. and Collinson, M. (2009), "Blended leadership': employee perspectives on effective leadership in the UK further education sector", *Leadership*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 365-380.

Cope, J., Kempster, S. and Parry, K. (2011), "Exploring distributed leadership in the small business context", *International Journal of Management Reviews*, Vol. 13 No. 3, pp. 270-285.

Dawson, P. (1994), *Organizational Change. A Processual Approach*, Paul Chapman Publishing, Liverpool.

Dawson, P. (2003), *Understanding Organizational Change: The Contemporary Experience of People at Work*, Sage, London.

Ford, R. (2006), "Open-processional change: three principles of reciprocal-relational power", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 6 No. 2, pp. 193-216.

Grint, K. (2010), "The sacred in leadership: separation sacrifice and silence", *Organizations Studies*, Vol. 31 No. 1, pp. 89-107.

Gronn, P. (2002), "Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 13 No. 4, pp. 423-451.

Gronn, P. (2009), "Leadership configurations", *Leadership*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 381-394.

Harris, A. (2012), "Distributed leadership: implications for the role of the principal", *Journal of Management Development*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 7-17.

Hayes J. (2002), *The Theory and Practice of Change Management*, Palgrave, New York, NY.

Heifetz, R.A. and Laurie, D.L. (1997), "The work of leadership", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 75 No. 1, pp. 124-134.

Higgs, M. and Rowland, D. (2005), "All changes great and small: exploring approaches to changes and its leadership", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 5 No. 2, pp. 121-151.

Johnson-Cramer, M.E., Cross, R.L. and Yan, A. (2003), "Sources of fidelity in purposive organizational change: lessons from a re-engineering case", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 7, pp. 1837-1870.

Jones, R.A., Jimmieson, N.L. and Griffiths, A. (2005), "The impact of organizational culture and reshaping capabilities on change implementation success: the mediating role of readiness for change", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 42 No. 2, pp. 361-386.

Kanter, R.M. (1984), *The Change Masters*, Routledge, London.

Kanter, R.M., Stein, B.A. and Jick, T.D. (1992), *The Challenge of Organizational Change*, The Free Press, New York, NY.

Kempster, S. and Parry, K. (2011), "Grounded theory and leadership research: a critical realist perspective", *Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 22 No. 1, pp. 106-120.

Kotter, J.P. (1995), "Leading change: why transformation efforts fail", *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 73 No. 2, pp. 59-67.

Kotter, J.P. (1996), *Leading Change*, Harvard Business School Press, Boston, MA.

Lewin, K. (1964), *Field Theory in Social Science*, Harper and Row, New York, NY.

Lewin, K. (1967), *Resolving Social Conflicts*, Harper and Row, New York, NY.

Littler, C.R., Wiesner, R. and Dunford, R. (2003), "The dynamics of delayering: changing management structures in three countries", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 40 No. 2, pp. 225-256.

Meindl, J.R. (1995), "The romance of leadership as a follower centric theory: a social constructionist approach", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 6 No. 3, pp. 329-341.

Miller, D. (1993), "The architecture of simplicity", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18 No. 1, pp. 116-138.

Morgan, G. (1998), *Images of Organizations: The Executive Edition*, Berett-Koehler Publishers, Sage, San Francisco, CA.

Nutt, P. (2004), "Organizational de-development", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 41 No. 7, pp. 1083-1103.

Orne, M.T. (1962), "On the social psychology of the psychological experiment: with particular reference to demand characteristics and their implications", *American Psychologist*, Vol. 17 No. 13, pp. 776-783.

Page, M., Wallace, M., McFarlane, W. and Lawd, J. (2008), "Emergent change and its implications for professional autonomy and managerial control: a case study from Midwifery", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 249-263.

Parry, K.W. and Bryman, A. (2006), "Leadership in organizations", in Clegg, S., Hardy, C., Lawrence, T. and Nord, W. (Eds), *The Sage Handbook of Organization Studies*, 2nd ed., Sage, London, pp. 447-468.

Pendelbury, J., Grouard, B. and Meston, F. (1998), *The Ten Keys to Successful Change Management*, John Wiley, Chichester.

Pettigrew, A. and Whipp, R. (1991), *Managing Change for Competitive Success*, Blackwell, Oxford.

Polaniecki, P. (2006), "Teaching through TV: transformative encounters with constructed reality", in Duncum P. (Ed.), *Visual Culture in the Art Class: Case Studies*, National Art Education Association, Reston, VA, pp. 39-46.

Quinn, J.B. (1980), "Managing strategic change", *Sloan Management Review*, Vol. 21 No. 4, pp. 3-20.

Ross, L., Rix, M. and Gold, J. (2005), "Learning distributed leadership: part 1", *Industrial and Commercial Training*, Vol. 37 No. 3, pp. 130-137.

Rowland, D. and Higgs, M.J. (2008), *Sustaining Change: Leadership that Works*, Jossey-Bass, London.

Saka, A. (2003), "Internal change agents' view of the management of change problems", *Journal of Organizational Change Management*, Vol. 16 No. 5, pp. 480-496.

Shaw, P. (1997), "Intervening in the shadow systems of organizations: consulting from a complexity perspective", *Journal of Organizational Change*, Vol. 10 No. 3, pp. 235-250.

Senior, B. and Fleming, S. (2006), *Organizational Change*, 3rd ed., Pearson Education, Harlow.

Stace, D. and Dunphy, D. (1998), *Beyond the Boundaries Leading and Recreating the Successful Enterprise*, McGraw-Hill, Sydney.

Stacey, R.D. (1996), *Complexity and Creativity in Organizations*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco, CA.

Thorpe, R., Gold, J., Anderson, L., Burgoyne, J., Wilkinson, D. and Malby, B. (2008), *Towards 'Leaderful' Communities in the North of England: Stories from the Northern Leadership Academy*, Oak Tree Press, Cork.

Townley, B. (1993), "Foucault, power/knowledge, and its relevance for human resource management", *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 18 No. 3, pp. 518-545.

Tyrrall, D. and Parker, D. (2005), "The fragmentation of a railway: a study of organizational change", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 42 No. 3, pp. 507-537.

Uhl-Bien, M. (2006), "Relational leadership theory: exploring the social processes of leadership and organizing", *The Leadership Quarterly*, Vol. 17 No. 1, pp. 654-676.

Weick, K.E. (1995), *Sense-Making in Organizations*, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Wheatley, M. (2006), *Leadership and the New Science: Discovering Order in a Chaotic World*, Berrett-Hoehler Publishers, Sage, San Francisco, CA.

Whelan-Berry, K.S. and Somerville, K.A. (2010), "Linking change drivers and the organizational change process: a review and synthesis", *Journal of Change Management*, Vol. 10 No. 2, pp. 175-193.

Whittington, R. and Mayer, M. (2002), *Organizing for Success in the Twenty-First Century: A Starting Point for Change*, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, London.

Wilson, D.C. (1992), *A Strategy of Change: Concepts and Controversies in the Management of Change*, Routledge, London.

Wilson, D.C., Butler, R.J., Cray, D., Hickson, D.J. and Mallory, G.R. (1986), "Breaking the bounds of organization in strategic decision making", *Human Relations*, Vol. 39 No. 4, pp. 309-332.

Wolfberg, A. and Stumborg, M. (2007), "Achieving clarity in a constantly changing environment", *Reflections*, Vol. 8 No. 3, pp. 11-22.

Further reading

Atkinson, D.J. and Day, M. (2004), "Large-scale transitional procurement change in the aerospace industry", *Journal of Purchasing and Supply Management*, Vol. 10 No. 6, pp. 257-268.

Bolden, R., Petrov, G. and Gosling, J. (2007), *Developing Collective Leadership in Higher Education: Final Report*, LFHE, London.

Brown, S.L. and Eisenhardt, K.M. (1997), "The art of continuous change: linking complexity theory and time-paced evolution in relentlessly shifting organisations", *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 42 No. 1, pp. 1-34.

Buchanan, D. and Dawson, P. (2007), "Discourse and audience: organizational change as multi-story process", *Journal of Management Studies*, Vol. 44 No. 5, pp. 669-686.

Collins, D. (1998), *Organizational Change: Sociological Perspectives*, Routledge, London.

Cummings, T. and Huse, E. (1989), *Organization Development and Change*, West Publishing Company, New York, NY.

Davis, S.A. (1967), "An organic problem-solving method of organizational change", *Journal of Applied Behavioural Science*, Vol. 3 No. 1, pp. 3-21.

Dunford, R.W. (1990), "A reply to Dunphy and Stace", *Organization Studies*, Vol. 11 No. 1, pp. 131-134.

Dunphy, D. and Stace, D. (1988), "Transformational and coercive strategies for planned organizational change: beyond the OD model", *Organizational Studies*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 339-355.

Hemelin, B.E. (1998), "Toward an economic theory of leadership: leading by example", *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 88 No. 5, pp. 1188-1206.

Lipitt, R., Watson, J. and Westley, B. (1958), *The Dynamics of Planned Change: A Comparative Study of Principles and Techniques*, Harcourt, Brace and World, New York, NY.

March, J.G. and Simon, H.A. (1993), *Organizations*, Cambridge Press, Blackwell, Oxford.

Pettigrew, A. (1985), "Examining change in the long-term context of culture and politics", in Srivastra, S. *et al.* (Eds), *Executive Power*, Jossey-Bass, London, pp. 649-670.

Schein, E. (1996), "Kurt Lewin's change theory in the field and in the classroom: notes toward a model of managed learning", *Systems Practice*, Vol. 9 No. 1, pp. 27-47.

Corresponding author
Dr Steve Kempster can be contacted at: s.kempster@lancaster.ac.uk