

Burke-Litwin Model Expansion:  
Resilience and Leadership within the Transformational Stage

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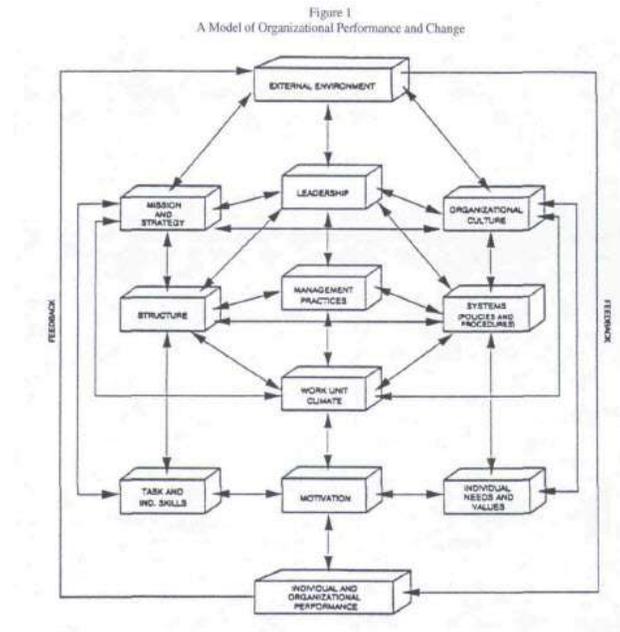
## **Burke-Litwin Model Expansion: Resilience and Leadership**

### **Introduction**

Francis Bacon surmised that ‘truth emerges more readily from error than from confusion’. (Bacon 1869). It should not surprise the reader that experience is a great teacher and from this observation many models have been designed to predict organizational performance. The Burke-Litwin causal model attempts to provide a framework that searches for causes related to organizational performance and change (1992). This model, although amply suited to provide some clarification surrounding organizational performance, lacks a solid connection with the psychological perspective of the leader. The transformational stage, defined by Burke-Litwin as the stage most effected by external and environmental forces (1992), is also the stage where the organization’s leadership appear to have the greatest impact. A greater understanding of the leaders’ level of resilience could serve to add more predictability to the outcome of the organization itself as the model is utilized.

### **Burke Litwin Model – Theoretical Foundation**

Burke’s 1992 article on performance and change proclaims early that the model provided leaned heavily against theory for its foundation, but moved quickly to non-academically based evidence for support (1992). This approach provides the beginning of expansion outlined within this paper. An attempt is made to dive more deeply into the psychological inputs and subsequent sociological outputs into what Burke-Litwin describes as transformational factors within the 1992 model. More specifically, this work focuses on the leaderships’ ability to be personally resilient when adversity arises in her personal or professional life and the impacts to the organization based on that resilience.



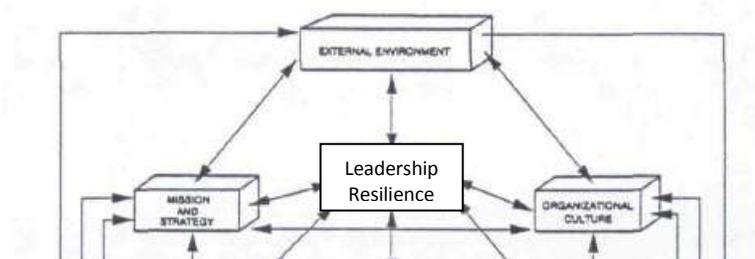
**Figure 1: Burke and Litwin (1992); A Causal Model of Organizational Performance and Change by Burke and Litwin**

## Resilience

Resilience in human beings has been seen as a state of weakness or even misunderstood as a sign of invulnerability (Walsh 1998). To further define what resilience means, Walsh structures it as the ‘capacity to rebound from adversity strengthened and more resourceful’ (1998). Walsh also states that challenges and crises are part of the human experience (1998). Therefore, since organizations exist due to human interactions, those same crises and challenges will be present within the boundaries of the organization. Businesses experience the same type of turmoil as individuals and those experiences help to define the very culture of the organization.

It is these very traits of resilience that Walsh speaks of that explains the suggested expansion of the Burke-Litwin model. This model assumes external organizational influences and is therefore a prime location to place the key area of resilience as an input. Furthermore,

Burke and Litwin expound on the foundational origins of this model as deeply connected to the work of Katz and Kahn's theory on open systems. Figure two indicates the expansion of the Burke-Litwin model with the addition of resilience to the leadership factor.



**Figure 2: Expanded Burke-Litwin Model including leadership resilience as an input**

### **Rationale and Implications**

Burke-Litwin posits that the causal model has foundations rooted in Katz and Kahn's general systems theory (1992). This structure requires some definition of leadership that may create actions within an organization. These actions could likely effect the organizations meaning, cultural positioning, or even the existence of the business itself. Resilience of the individual leaders could then directly influence the fabric of the transformational decisions made within the Burke-Litwin model.

According to Katz and Kahn, leadership behaviors occur in any one of three settings (1978). The first location where leadership behavior occurs is the introduction of structure. This setting is influenced significantly by external influences on the organization, and according to Katz and Kahn is the most difficult. The second situation is during the interpolation of structure, also known as improvisation in which the leader pieces out, or improvises, policy to keep the organization moving (Katz, 1978). Finally, the third setting suggested by Katz and Kahn where

leadership behavior occurs is during the application of structure. This environment is utilized to maintain the motion of the organization. The final setting is known as administration. From Katz and Kahn's suggested areas where leadership occurs, enhancement to the Burke-Litwin model takes place within the transformational area. This area is where Burke-Litwin suggests leadership has the greatest influence and therefore it's in this section that enhancement is suggested (1992).

Katz and Kahn state that when executive leaders believe differently than the stated organizational strategy and culture, the organization is doomed (1978). It is this factor in the Burke-Litwin model noted as 'leadership' where the essence of resilience is lacking. The reworded and expanded box should become 'Leadership Resilience'. As noted by Walsh a study by Werner and Smith's of 700 deemed at risk with 'low potential for success' children, two thirds ended up meeting the predictions of early pregnancy, trouble with the law, or a need for mental health services (Walsh 1998). However the research goes on to demonstrate that one third of those children considered highly resilient went on to become productive citizens and even surpassed many non at-risk children in many areas (Walsh 1998).

Based on Walsh's noted research by Werner & Smith and the Burke –Litwin model's transformational focus area, it can be suggested that, like the leader herself, the organization is influenced highly by the leader's ability to be resilient in the face of adversity. This framework outlines the idea of expansion in the Burke-Litwin model. Further comparison can be made by reviewing other organizational models.

### **Schwandt Model**

The Schwandt model elaborates Talcott Parson's Theory of Action (Schwandt 1997). Schwandt expands the subsystems originally outlined by Parsons and in doing so provides

evidentiary support for expansion of the Burke-Litwin model. Integration is described by Parsons as the subsystem required to ‘establish controls, avoid disturbances, maintain coordination, and inhibit deviant tendencies’ (1997). This system is expanded by Schwandt to include the subsystem ‘structuring’ that is responsible for management acts and social norms (1997). This area is also dependent on interpersonal mechanisms for information to be shared and moved along through the organization (1997). The structuring subsystem allows for the other subsystems to remain connected and provides sense making to the organization (1997). Schwandt adds that strategic questioning of the organization will help to measure external forces on the organization. One such question suggested with the learning subsystem labeled structuring is, “how is success and failure documented?” (1997). Resilience levels within the leader could influence these key steps. If the leader is unable to be resilient during a failed situation and not learn from the past, the organization may be subject to the lack of resilience demonstrated by the leader.

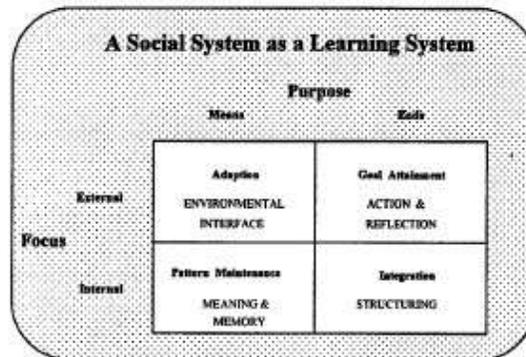
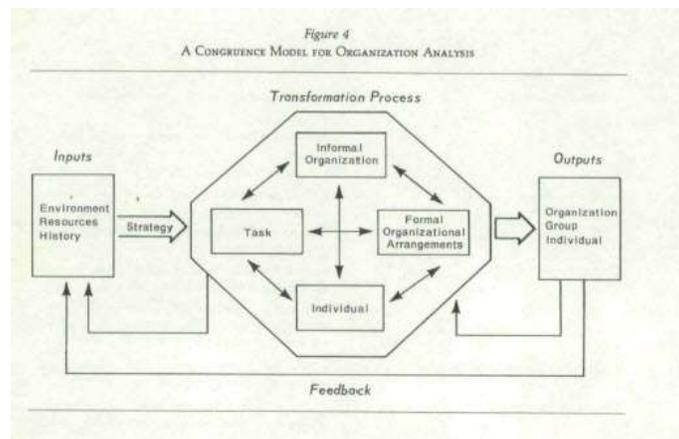


Figure 2. The Model of Organizational Learning

**Figure 3: Schwandt (1997); A theory of action perspective, In J.P. Walsh A.S. Huff (Eds.), Advances in Strategic Management (Vol 14)**

## Nadler-Tushman

Nadler-Tushman's congruence model defines organizational success as proper fit of the critical components (1980). Specifically, this congruence model defines one of the transformation processes as 'individuals'. This component of the organization deals with the nature and characteristic of the employees. More specifically, Nadler points out that the workers perceptions as defined by their demographic background influences this component (1980). Nadler-Tushman also subscribes to Katz and Kahn's general systems theory. Based on these two critical points of convergence with Burke-Litwin, this is evidence that supports expansion of model to include leadership resilience.



**Figure 4: Nadler (1980) taken from 'A Model for Diagnosing Organizational Behavior', *Organizational Dynamics* volume 9, no. 2**

## Conclusion

Burke-Litwin's model attempts to portray a predictive flow of factors that indicate organizational performance as an output (1992). This model is largely void of the leader's internal motivators and intrinsic drivers that effect the organization. While there are many psychological factors that could greatly impact the input from the leadership, there exists an

infinitely complex stream of resilience levels from within the leader. Utilizing these measured resilience levels could benefit the organizational need for sustainment, growth, or even planned closure.

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