

Book Review

BOOK TITLE: [Re]Create The Organization You Really Want! Leadership And Organization Design For Sustainable Excellence (2016)

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Executive leaders and organization design consultants often work at the center of major organization design challenges: satisfying the needs of several stakeholder groups, navigating intensifying competition, adapting to continuous technology changes, and mastering a myriad of organizational dynamics. Though these modern management hurdles may seem daunting, John Latham, PhD, says that creating sustainable excellence in the form of value for all key organizational stakeholders is a core leadership responsibility. With *[Re]Create the Organization You Really Want*, Latham (2016) explores the task of taking a systems approach to organizational design to create “ever-improving value for multiple stakeholders including the workforce, customers, investors, suppliers and partners, society, and the natural environment” (p. 11).

Adopting the mindset of an organizational architect, Latham (2016) draws on intersecting research from a number of disciplines to discuss a new approach to strategic leadership: producing value across a comprehensive scorecard by sustainably transforming organizational systems. The author provides a “Leadership and Design Blueprint” (p. 21) and a series of essential questions for executive leaders to apply in structuring organizational transformation to performance excellence. The book is formatted as a fourteen-element guide for designing and navigating the journey to sustainable excellence.

Latham (2016) sorts the fourteen elements into five major areas including the forces and facilitators of change, a culture of service, the individual leader, a collaborative leadership style, and at the center of the blueprint, the organization’s leadership system. The leadership system encompasses the interlinked activities and tasks for aligning the organization toward performance excellence: understanding stakeholder needs; forming a compelling directive; developing a focused strategy; enabling, empowering, and engaging the workforce; [re]designing organizational systems and processes; measuring success according to a comprehensive scorecard; employing continuous performance review; aligning, coaching, and appreciating behaviors; and finally, facilitating continuous learning and improvement processes.

Each of the fourteen components is explored in depth over the course of the book. Latham (2016) offers key practical insights and crucial linkages among the design elements. Additionally, the author provides supporting information that includes initiative planning templates, reflective questions for consideration, and leadership system examples. The author delves into great detail situating each aspect of the key elements in the blueprint, explaining why each is important and what results may be expected if the component is not effectively addressed in the effort to create sustainable excellence.

The concept of *[Re]Create* was borne from Latham's (2016) personal experience as an executive and from his academic research. Much of the data supporting the theoretical frameworks and conceptual maps at the core of the work came from a study Latham (2013a & 2013b) conducted with fourteen CEOs who each led their organizations through performance excellence transformations that culminated in Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Awards.

[Re]Create the Organization You Really Want presents a sturdy bridge between management theory and practical application, highlighting evidence-based management as a crucial aspect of organization [re]design. The text itself is targeted primarily for executive managers and organization architects; Latham (2016) bounds the work presented in the book explaining, "there is no heavy-handed management theory required for this process" (p. 161). While the text is effectively supported by scholarly research and key citations to other essential works, the text is presented as a walk through the Leadership and Design Blueprint with an application focus.

Working from a cross-disciplinary field of research, Latham's (2016) book extends the current scholarly dialogue regarding organizational learning, leadership, and strategy. With its focus on designing and institutionalizing systems within the organization, Latham's (2016) work draws together the discussion from change management and transformation (e.g., Cameron & McNaughtan, 2014; Malhotra & Hinings, 2015), to practical applications of organizational learning theory (Chadwick & Raver, 2015; Lengnick-Hall & Inocencio-Gray, 2013), and to strategic management (Leonardi, 2015).

Latham's (2016) work also offers an interesting supplement to current research on strategy-as-practice. The work addresses the practical considerations and contextual sensitivities Jarzabkowski, Kaplan, Seidl, and Whittington (2016) called for in their analysis of current work employing a practice-based view of strategy. By advocating for an evidence-based approach to management and the systems perspective, Latham avoids the isolated focus on best practices Jarzabkowski et al. (2016) criticized. Latham also explores the "network of relationships" Seidl and Whittington (2014) referenced in their call for strategy-as-practice research employing "flatter" ontologies than are traditionally applied in the discipline (p. 1408). Though the research supporting the book's frameworks and assertions does not follow the ethnographic approach typical to strategy-as-practice research, Latham's (2016) approach does capture an extensive look into practices and pitfalls of strategy and organization [re]design.

[Re]Create the Organization You Really Want provides an accessible reference applicable to most strategic leaders embarking on organizational design journeys. It is important to note however that readers looking for an easily summarized or heavily generalized resource will be disappointed. The book does not contain prescriptive instructions for leaders; the work instead offers important questions and key points for consideration for a reflective and iterative approach to strategic leadership and the complexities of organizational transformation. In a similar vein, the book is also bounded to the degree that extensive discussions linking the author's assertions with management theory and other current research are left in the author's previously published journal articles. Scholars seeking a more in-depth explanations of the links between the Leadership and Design Blueprint and the larger dialogue of theoretical work should reference Latham's (2012, 2013a, & 2013b) publications, each of which serves to more explicitly ground his frameworks to management theory.

As presented, however, *[Re]Create the Organization You Really Want* stands as an essential desk guide for any executive, change agent, or consultant looking for more reflective ways to approach the task of sustainably improving performance across a comprehensive scorecard via organization design. The work is sound, evidence-based, and well-referenced. Though the framework and its supporting elements are presented in a sequential manner, the work may be referenced as needed for insights on

each stage of the organization [re]design process and applied to facilitate important reflection and discussion in leading the transformation to performance excellence.

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