

# The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations

## A Case Study

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### Abstract

Graduate students and faculty at The George Washington University (GWU) partnered with Global Organization (GO) to identify and ameliorate challenges related to the rapid cycling of organizational change. The purpose of this case study was to gather a baseline of individual symptoms and their impact on organizational attitudes to develop an informed and defined action plan for continuing transitions. Research was conducted to improve the overall effectiveness of GO, which is renowned for its unique identity and international relationships, as well as to create a customized method for maintaining organizational effectiveness through transitions. Results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses are presented. The discussion includes comprehensive recommendations and implementation strategies that can enable GO to successfully redefine its mission and address any critical organizational symptoms. The implications of the current study may also prove relevant for other global organizations faced with continuous change.

**Keywords:** Organizational Change, Trust, Effectiveness, Resistance, Culture, Change Success

### Introduction

To remain relevant in a global community, organizations must constantly reevaluate their purpose and maintain a sense of urgency. Yet many organizations avoid the uncertainty inherent with change at all costs, resulting in a stigma associated with the term *organizational change*. This fear of change is not unfounded, given that 70% of transition initiatives fail (Beer & Nohria,

2000; Grady, 2012; Kotter, 1995; The Standish Group International, 2009). Although many change theorists celebrate their method as the most efficient mechanism for successfully managing change, we suggest that there is no one right change theory or model. Unlike strictly linear change models, a customizable change approach combining elements from the extant literature such as Duck (1993) and Kotter (1995) can be especially appropriate when dealing with the complexity of multinational organizations.

This study examined Global Organization (GO), an established multinational military and defense institution, that experienced challenges with continuous change since merging with its larger parent organization, Allied. Although this merger has the potential to produce an invaluable and powerful partnership, many challenges have surfaced and impeded its progress to date. Of particular significance, GO was unable to clearly define its functions, processes, and chain of command and began to question its true organizational purpose. Namely, the convergence of GO and Allied's rich histories and cultures led to identity ambiguity, rather than mutual empowerment and support. In addition, several chief factions within GO strongly disagreed about how to successfully move forward. Because its current leadership will soon transition out of office, the timing for targeted organizational intervention is both opportune and critical for ensuring the future of GO.

The purpose of this study was to gauge baseline individual symptoms of volatility and organizational outcomes prior to the change in leadership and to make recommendations regarding how GO should continue to reform to better meet its strategic objectives. During times of uncertainty, it is essential to use an organizational change assessment to reevaluate the direction of an organization (Grady & Grady, 2013; Kotter, 1995). Therefore, the quantitative data in this study was conducted using the Loss of Effectiveness (LOE) Index<sup>®</sup> Survey, a validated change management tool (Grady, 2012).

The LOE Index<sup>®</sup> is based on new research (Grady & Grady, 2013) related to attachment theory that assesses the level of change volatility within an individual with regard to the collective impact on the organization. Bowlby (1969) first studied attachment behavior in infants, and later proposed that this phenomenon also spanned into adulthood in relation to social groups and institutions. In subsequent studies, Winnicott (1971) found that the use of transitional objects by both infants and adults increased the likelihood of a successful change. Because the loss of stability during a period of change is a consequential event that many linear change models do not adequately address, we propose a customized change approach that serves as a transitional object to facilitate employee support and therefore improve organizational outcomes (Grady, 2012).

By analyzing both quantitative and qualitative data sets, we observed individual symptoms and developed mitigation strategies to overcome these challenges. The quantitative and qualitative results were consistent with one another, providing even stronger validation for the findings. Through the identification of these symptoms and with the use of observational tools such as Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980), we were able to outline a "to be" state for the organization. Furthermore, we developed and outlined a comprehensive set of change management recommendations that not only support the current transition of leadership but also provide a strong foundation toward satisfying the intended mission of the organization.

The paper is organized into six parts. First, we provide background on the organization's environment. Second, we present the rationale for using the LOE Index<sup>®</sup> research methodology, along with the procedures for data collection. Third, we provide a detailed description of the results and findings. Fourth, we offer recommendations that directly link to GO's organizational

symptoms and challenges. Fifth, we discuss a mode of implementation. The last section details the risks of non-implementation and their implications for other multinational organizations, along with lessons learned and research limitations.

### **Organizational Environment**

Throughout decades of independent operation, GO established a rich history due in part to the unique cultures of its employees and collaborators. Since merging with Allied, both organizations have experienced numerous challenges related to structure, culture, communication, and resources resulting from both episodic and continuous change (Weick & Quinn, 1999). Currently, GO is composed of three primary divisions that direct the internal and external business processes of the organization: The Executive Division oversees policy and governance, the Administrative Division handles daily internal business operations, and the Training Division provides workforce training and support services to GO and its employees. Due to the culturally diverse make-up of the organization, GO conducts meetings, correspondence, and other general business activities in multiple languages.

Having been subsumed by Allied without first clearly defining its functions, resources, and chain of command, GO has been unable to maintain its unique identity to the satisfaction of its stakeholders, and the prospect of change has triggered anxiety among many within the organization. In addition, cultural barriers within all three divisions have been difficult for GO to manage; therefore, it is imperative to understand the role that national cultures play in the overall organizational system (Hofstede, 1980).

The impact of these factors on GO's ability to function efficiently have created numerous conflicts regarding the best method of integration with Allied. Given Allied's control over GO's budget and funding, the need for GO to effectively integrate and manage change is critical for future growth and development.

### **Method**

#### **Participants**

This study entailed a mixed-method approach with quantitative survey and qualitative interview analyses. Participants in the quantitative portion of the study included 51 GO employees. Approximately 25.5% of the participants were from the Training Division ( $n = 13$ ), 37.25% were from the Executive Division ( $n = 19$ ), and 37.25% were Administrative Division employees ( $n = 19$ ). The total sample of 51 represents almost 47% of the total organizational population ( $N = 109$ ), which is a satisfactory return rate for organizational surveys of this nature. Participants in the qualitative portion of the study consisted of nine of GO's senior executives representing eight countries.

#### **Procedure**

To conduct the study, permission was obtained from and communicated to staff by GO's senior leadership. For the quantitative analysis, electronic correspondence was sent to all 109 members of GO inviting them to take part in a web-based survey. The instrument used was the LOE Index<sup>®</sup>, a 54-item survey with responses rated on a Likert scale, along with three open-response questions tailored for this study. Survey instructions, questions, and responses were

also translated into GO employees’ predominant languages to better ensure comprehension for the majority of survey respondents.

For the qualitative analysis, formal in-person interviews were conducted onsite by one to three GWU graduate students and supervised by one to two GWU PhD faculty members. Most of the interviews were conducted in English, with two interviews conducted in the primary language used at GO by request. The interviews lasted 1 to 4 hours and took place in each participant's office or in the board room. Participants were asked five prepared questions, and follow-up questions were asked based on their responses. The five prepared questions were as follows: (a) What is working well at GO that should be preserved? (b) What is not working well at GO? (c) What specific changes would you suggest to make GO more effective? (d) What would help you better manage the day-to-day activities of GO? and (e) Do you have any additional comments (e.g., about morale, absenteeism, productivity, turnover, conflict, or motivation)? Permission was requested to record the interviews, and eight of the nine interview sessions were recorded and transcribed for later review; members of the interview teams also took detailed notes.

### **Quantitative Measures**

Grady and Grady (2013) attributed attachment issues as a cause of the 70% failure rate associated with organizational change initiatives. Attachment theory states that “human beings instinctively and often subconsciously attach to people, groups, or other objects to establish a sense of security throughout their lifetime” (Grady & Grady, 2013, p. 81). This explains the natural human reaction to change, indicating that employees do not actively resist a change as much as they want to avoid the feelings of loss associated with transition (Harvey, 1999). When organizations begin change initiatives, a lack of stability is created throughout the organization, resulting in certain symptoms that decrease organizational effectiveness and productivity. Grady and Grady (2013) developed the organizational LOE model depicting the individual symptoms that surface when organizations are faced with change and the impact those symptoms have on the organization (see Table 1).

Table 1: Individual Symptoms of Loss and Their Organizational Equivalents (Grady & Grady, 2013)

<b>Individual Symptoms</b>	<b>Organizational Equivalents</b>
Apprehension (Anxiety)	Decreased Morale
Frustration	Decreased Productivity
Retardation of Development	Decreased Motivation
Rejection of the Environment	Increased Conflict
Refuse to Participate	Increased Absenteeism
Withdrawal	Increased Turnover

The LOE Index<sup>®</sup> measures the nature and intensity of these symptoms using a 54-item survey designed to provide quantitative data to identify, monitor, and track emerging symptoms across an organization (Grady & Grady, 2013). The quantitative organizational score is determined by using the summation of averaged individual scores on each survey question.

Higher scores indicate greater volatility, with 2.0 as the critical value between stability and disarray.

The LOE Index<sup>®</sup> endured a rigorous validation process through 14 iterations between 2005 and 2007 (Grady, Gleckel, & Grody, 2009). Content validity was established through correlation with established measures of constructs relating to anxiety, stress, frustration, depression, and employee morale and work preferences. The measure also demonstrates face validity as evidenced through the corroborations of multiple experts in the fields of organizational behavior and social psychology. Test/retest reliability during the pre-implementation stage was assessed through the Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test (Wilcoxon, 1945) in which no significant differences were found between the first and second administration of the test (Grady & Grady, 2012). Furthermore, internal consistency reliability testing revealed Cronbach’s alpha (Cronbach, 1951) ranging from .85 to .91 (Grady & Grady, 2012).

**Qualitative Measures**

In addition to the quantitative items, three open-response qualitative questions were added to the LOE Index<sup>®</sup> to provide participants with an avenue to address specific concerns for GO: (a) What is working well in GO that should be kept? (b) What is not working so well in GO? and (c) What changes would you suggest to make GO more effective? These questions mirrored those asked during the in-person interviews to allow all participants to contribute their views on these issues.

**Results**

**Quantitative Results**

The quantitative portion of this study yielded several noteworthy results. To assist with the interpretation of these findings, Table 2 provides an interpretation of the index scores and their descriptions.

Table 2: Interpretation of LOE Index<sup>®</sup> Scores (Grady & Grady, 2013)

<b>Index Score</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
=1	Indicates the organization is functioning in a stable environment
>1 to 2	Indicates the organization is functioning in a relatively stable environment, however management should be aware of the potential for volatility
>2 to 3	Indicates the organization is experiencing volatility and management attention is required
>3 to 4	Indicates the organization is relatively unstable, heightened management intervention is required
>4 to 5	Indicates the organization is very unstable and absolute intervention is required

Table 3 shows the distribution of the scores for each symptom and the average baseline LOE Index<sup>®</sup> for GO. While a baseline score of 1.98 is still within the normal range (i.e., 1.5 to

2.0) of scores; it is on the verge of volatility (2.0+). According to Grady and Grady (2013), this indicates that GO leadership should be attentive to the impact of current and future change initiatives with regard to the performance of the organization, and that quick action is necessary to prevent losing organizational effectiveness.

Table 3: GO's Overall Average LOE Index<sup>®</sup> Score for Each Symptom.

	<b>Gc/Cc</b>	<b>An/Mr</b>	<b>Fr/LP</b>	<b>Rd/Mv</b>	<b>Re/Cf</b>	<b>Rp/Ab</b>	<b>Wd/To</b>	<b>Average</b>
<b>Overall Average</b>	1.85	2.23	2.12	2.02	1.95	1.73	1.94	1.98

**Legend:**

- Gc/Cc = Global predisposition toward change within the organizational environment
- An/Mr = Anxiety/Morale
- Fr/LP = Frustration/Loss of Productivity
- Rd/Mv = Retardation of Development/Motivation
- Re/Cf = Rejection of the Environment/Conflict
- Rp/Ab = Refusal to Participate/Absenteeism
- Wd/To = Withdrawal/Turnover

The LOE Index<sup>®</sup> subscales indicating the highest volatility (above 2.0 and highlighted in red) were anxiety, frustration, and retardation of development, with anxiety being the highest. Many areas scored close to being considered volatile. This is a critical time to be taking action to alleviate current concerns and prevent additional adverse outcomes.

**Anxiety and morale.** Organizational anxiety is characterized by signs of tension and is typically in reaction to some stressor. If left unaddressed, anxiety may lead to a reduction in morale (Grady & Grady, 2013). Anxiety earned the highest overall average score of 2.23 in this sample, with scores ranging from 1.00 to 3.56. It is noteworthy that the anxiety average score is higher than the global average.

**Frustration and loss of productivity.** Individuals become frustrated when they are prevented from doing or achieving something, resulting in loss of interest, increased irritability, and reduced productivity (Grady & Grady, 2013). Frustration has the second highest overall score in this sample with an average of 2.11. Scores ranged from 1.00 to 3.17.

**Retardation of development and motivation.** Organizational change poses a threat to employee competence, relatedness, and autonomy and can result in individual retardation of development (Grady & Grady, 2013). Retardation of development can then lead to a lack of motivation, productivity, and attention to detail (Ryan & Deci, 2000)—causing delayed adherence to the change initiative, and affecting employees' skills advancement (Grady & Grady, 2013). It is interesting to note that the overall average score for Retardation of Development was 2.02, which is the third highest among all symptoms.

**Rejection of the environment and conflict.** Rejection of the environment is usually the result of individuals' concern with the new change initiative affecting their work environment,

which they perceive as being forced upon them (Grady & Grady, 2013). This conflict is the mental struggle resulting from incompatible or opposing needs, drives, wishes, or external or internal demands (Grady & Grady, 2013). According to the data, the overall average score of rejection of the environment is 1.96, indicating a current environment with potential volatility, and close enough to 2.0 that it requires increased management attention.

**Refusal to participate.** Absenteeism stems from two places: a change in job satisfaction and dysfunctional relations between employee and employer (Grady & Grady, 2013). The LOE Index<sup>®</sup> score for Refusal to Participate was the lowest of the six, but it is still approaching 2.0 with a score of 1.73.

**Withdrawal and turnover.** The overall score for Withdrawal, 1.94, approached the threshold for volatility. Detachment from the organization results in increased turnover (Grady & Grady, 2013), a source of volatility inherent in the current organizational structure.

### **Qualitative Results**

As previously indicated, formal interviews were conducted with key stakeholders in the organization to capture more in-depth perspectives of the challenges faced by GO. This allowed us to gather specific information that the LOE Index<sup>®</sup> did not capture. Additionally, this provided another dimension of analysis, which allowed for a more customized approach to the recommendations. Participants were asked what is going well at GO, what is not going well at GO, and what changes could be made to make GO more effective. Several leaders were also asked what they could do to improve the management of day-to-day activities at GO and what additional comments they had with regard to morale, absenteeism, productivity, turnover, conflict, or motivation.

Overall, participants indicated that the organization's strong cultural history, multinational representation, and international relationships are valued strengths of the organization. On the other hand, many participants indicated that communication issues are paramount. They also expressed concerns regarding the organizational structure and lack of continuity within the organization—in fact, organizational structure was identified as the element most in need of change. Namely, stakeholders desire a stronger connection to Allied and a reorganization of the current branch structures.

## **Discussion**

### **Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions**

GO is comprised of a diverse group of staff from across the globe; thus, it is imperative to understand the role that national culture plays in the overall organizational system (Hofstede, 1980), especially given that there are strong correlations “between national culture dimensions and individual readiness and commitment to change” (Aldulaimi & Sailan, 2012, p. 187). Cultural and language barriers were a readily observed theme throughout the interviews and LOE Index<sup>®</sup> responses.

In addition to the LOE Index<sup>®</sup>, we used Hofstede's cultural dimensions (1980) as a framework to analyze the qualitative data and incorporate this theory into the discussion of results, recommendations, implementation strategy, and limitations. Hofstede (1980) categorized cultures along the following dimensions: individualism/collectivism, power distance, uncertainty

avoidance, and masculinity/femininity. These cultural dimensions have been further validated by other studies that have also concluded that organizational readiness for change is affected by antecedent variables such as culture, and that using these dimensions will aid in the organizational implementation of change initiatives (Aldulaimi & Sailan, 2012).

We are careful to note that variability exists within any country and that these dimensions reflect the overall approach of a society and may not apply to each individual. GO member countries vary widely on some of Hofstede's (1980) cultural dimensions, such as uncertainty avoidance versus comfort with ambiguity, and individualism versus collectivism. Uncertainty avoidance examines the extent to which people in a particular culture feel threatened by ambiguous situations and create institutions (with rules and regulations) to avoid such ambiguity (Hofstede, 1980). This is perhaps the most significant cultural variable affecting acceptance of and openness to change, as change inevitably produces uncertainty. This is one of GO's most significant challenges. Additionally, GO member countries vary widely on the spectrum from very individualistic to collectivistic cultures. Views on loyalty to one's self and immediate family as opposed to an extended family or group are affected by this dimension. Also worth noting is the dimension of masculine versus feminine societies, with "masculine" societies putting greater emphasis on achievement and success, and "feminine" societies placing more value on quality of life.

### **A Passive–Aggressive Organization**

When looking at GO's numerous cultural, institutional, and individual factors together, they bear the characteristics of a passive–aggressive organization in which "lines of authority are unclear, merit is not rewarded, and people have learned to smile, nod, and do just enough to get by" (Neilson, Pasternack, & Van Nuys, 2005, p. 1). Specifically, passive–aggressive organizations are marked by unclear scopes of authority that lead to misunderstandings and misrepresentations regarding decision making power (Neilson et al., 2005), as well as misleading goals due to a failure to "properly align incentives and goals of the organization" (Neilson et al., 2005, p. 2). In addition, employees tend to give the impression of compliance without true agreement (Neilson et al., 2005).

### **Interpretation of Quantitative and Qualitative Results**

Overall, GO has struggled with its identity and purpose since its merger with Allied, and the prospect of organizational change has triggered anxiety among current employees. Defining the organization's mission and purpose, and institutionalizing a 5-year strategic plan, will help guide the evolution of GO.

Organizations that are traditionally focused on command and control leadership have an expectation that there will be one clear leader producing measurable results (Laurence, 2011). The difference between a hierarchical structure and a more horizontal environment contributes to varied expectations between GO and Allied. Additionally, as a result of the tumultuous histories of many of the countries that are a part of GO, some member countries may be reluctant to trust and collaborate with others unless they maintain some level of control over the process. Another source of frustration reported in the qualitative responses was the short tenure of GO employees. The hiring process takes approximately four months, and the remaining tenure is often too short to make measurable progress on any projects. Reasons for perceptions of delayed development may stem from frequent changes in leadership and personnel. GO's headquarters also proved to be a source of anxiety. After its merger with Allied, GO chose to stay at its own headquarters

rather than move to Allied headquarters. Some GO employees are opposed to the idea of moving to Allied headquarters in fear that GO will relinquish its identity by doing so. Conversely, other GO employees agree that close physical proximity is key for establishing better communication, relationships, and integration with Allied.

### Recommendations

The results from both the qualitative and quantitative data collection yielded consistent results. This increases the validity of the findings and certainty of the recommendations. Overlaying the results of the quantitative LOE survey and the responses from the qualitative individual interviews with key GO leadership and staff, the researchers identified the primary challenges and the direct impact on GO’s organizational effectiveness. Table 4 summarizes these findings. The text in red refers to the areas of highest volatility and importance.

Table 4. GO’s Primary Challenges and the Impact on the Organization

Primary Challenge		Impact on GO
Undefined Expectations/Goals		<b>Decreased Morale</b>
Lack of visibility/ Transparency		<b>Decreased Morale</b>
Unclear Identity of GO		<b>Increased Conflict</b>
Blurred Roles/Responsibility		<b>Decreased Motivation</b>
High Bureaucracy/ Low Empowerment		<b>Decreased Motivation</b>
High Turnover Rate		<b>Increased Turnover</b>
Limited Training/ Qualifications		<b>Loss of Productivity</b>

Table 5 illustrates the long-term mitigation strategies that were developed to directly address the areas of volatility referenced in Table 4.

The suggested mitigation strategies address both the individual symptom and the corresponding organizational outcome. A customized mitigation strategy was created for each organizational symptom, and some symptoms are addressed by more than one strategy. The recommendations in Table 5 are further described below.

**Addressing low morale: Creation of a Transition Management Team.** To increase commitment and morale, employees must be involved in the decision-making and change process (Nongo & Ikyanyon, 2012). Step two of Kotter’s (1995) eight steps to transforming an organization requires forming a powerful guiding coalition with enough clout to lead a successful change effort. A newly created Transition Management Team (TMT) (Duck, 1993) at GO would study the recommendations presented herein and make decisions on how to move forward. This core team would include representatives from all divisions within GO as well as representatives from Allied, all of whom have diverse opinions and the power to implement the new changes, address improvements in communication, and increase leadership support. This group would exist outside of the current hierarchy, help to implement the workforce and structural analysis discussed earlier, and work to “align key dimensions of the change process

and dedicate resources to provide ongoing support for the change process” (Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997, p.18). We believe it would be prudent to use an external independent facilitator to assist in this effort. Third-party facilitators bring outside perspectives from other organizations and can assist with moderating discussions while ensuring full participation and pushing for actionable results.

Table 5: Suggested Mitigation Strategies Aligned to LOE Symptoms and Scores

<b>Individual Symptom</b>	<b>Organizational Symptom</b>	<b>LOE Score</b>	<b>Score Meaning</b>	<b>Suggested Mitigation Strategy</b>
Anxiety	Low Morale	2.2288	Volatility; requires management attention	Increase support from Leadership/Sponsorship → <i>Create transition management team</i>
Frustration	Low Productivity	2.1176	Volatility; requires management attention	Increase education/training with the identified change → <i>Create knowledge management system</i>
Retardation of Development	Low Motivation	2.0240	Volatility; requires management attention	Integrate individual coaching → <i>Develop Human Resource (HR) support function</i>
Rejection of Environment	High Conflict	1.9542	Relatively stable environment, with potential for volatility	Improve communication → <i>Strengthen internal and external communication strategy; develop closer communication between divisions</i>
Withdrawal	High Turnover	1.9384	Relatively stable environment, with potential for volatility	Address job satisfaction and commitment → <i>Operationally define mission and purpose; define succession planning procedures</i>
Refusal to Participate	High Absenteeism	1.7255	Relatively stable environment, with potential for volatility	Increase employee engagement and support → <i>Reduce physical and emotional distance between GO and Allied; use informal activities to enhance delegate relations</i>

**Addressing low productivity: Creation of a knowledge management system.**

Throughout the assessment, GO employees expressed concerns about the lack of collaboration and communication on projects. A knowledge management system with established communities

of practice (each with a different topic and members) would help employees collaborate informally on projects and issues and share recent activities and accomplishments in a transparent way. Furthermore, a mentorship program whereby incoming representatives are trained by departing representatives who have successfully completed their tenure would help capture and transfer knowledge to new staff and therefore ensure consistency and continuity during transitions.

**Addressing low motivation: Development of a human resources support function.**

There is a strong need for the establishment of a robust human resources (HR) support system and staff, led by a mixture of employees from many nationalities who would have longer, more permanent terms. This team, along with internal communication experts, would work to develop stronger organizational alignment with the newly created mission as well as communicate new goals across the organization. The group would help review the current organizational structure and look to more clearly define the divisions and hierarchy between different positions.

This effort would involve an in-depth evaluation of the current positional and functional statements of each area within the organization by reviewing the job descriptions of each employee. An effective approach would be to use competency modeling, thereby enabling the determination of the specific traits and skills that are characteristic of high performance and success in a given role. Knowing what is expected and hiring the right person for each position would help eliminate some of the frustration and uncertainty experienced by GO employees.

This HR function would also set up social activities for GO to help build relationships outside of formal functions. Social interactions among GO employees would promote feelings of solidarity and trust as well as increase motivation.

**Addressing high conflict: Strengthening the internal and external communication strategy.** To improve visibility and transparency, GO should develop closer communication and coordination between the leadership offices, strengthen its external communication ability, develop a unique brand, and use a cascading strategic communications plan to inform staff (both vertically and horizontally) of activities, changes, and updates using multiple media and languages.

By marketing its purpose through the use of social media and a stronger web presence, GO would increase its visibility and public awareness of the organization. Many of those surveyed also spoke about using strategic branding to help others understand the value GO brings to the environment in which it operates.

The qualitative assessment showed that GO needs to align its new mission and identity with its external persona. This would help the organization progress from the past into its recreated future. A symbolic fix—replacing the organizational name with something more widely accepted, and involving stakeholders in participative decision making—would increase engagement and commitment (Gilley, Gilley, & McMillan, 2009) and may also relieve some of the cultural tensions felt within the organization.

**Addressing high turnover: Operationally define the mission and purpose and define the succession planning procedures.** To clearly define its mission, GO should create and institutionalize a 5-year strategic plan to guide its evolution. The detailed and agreed-upon strategic plan should use performance measurement criteria linked to goals and objectives, and

should include an agreed-upon GO vision. The strategic plan needs broad-based support of GO employees, suggesting the need for a collaborative approach to its design and implementation.

To address job satisfaction and commitment and increase training, GO should consider establishing a new leadership structure that would create more consistency and continuity for employees and would allow GO to align its structures with surrounding environmental conditions and organizational goals (Molly & Wren, 1998).

We also propose extending the terms of essential leadership positions. Whichever model is adopted, we recommend that a new leader be elected with sufficient time to shadow the outgoing leader in a mentor–mentee role during the preceding leader’s final year in office. Longer terms for senior executives would minimize the transition lag and ensure continuity in long-term goal achievement.

To solidify these changes, GO should develop written policies and governance documentation to establish staff requirements and qualifications as well as term lengths for top leadership positions. In addition, GO should develop contingency and succession planning processes to facilitate smoother staff transitions.

**Addressing high absenteeism: Reduce physical and emotional distance between GO and Allied.** To enhance the reputation and credibility of GO, its leadership should increase the organization’s visibility by establishing a stronger alignment with Allied. Integration through organizational restructuring and an enhanced partnership with the GO would allow Allied to reconceive GO as a highly valuable asset and therefore allocate the resources needed for it to succeed and fulfill its purpose, including the necessary infrastructure, HR, technology, and communications support.

Reducing the physical and emotional distance of GO and Allied would enable GO to benefit from the services that are already in the Allied budget, and having the two organizations in closer “proximity promotes readiness of communication, as a result of which individuals have an opportunity to discover each other’s common attitudes” (Newcomb, 1961, p. 208). This would allow GO to better integrate with Allied’s overarching organizational culture and would foster the joint creation and ownership of initiatives and projects.

To successfully implement these changes, transitional objects must be identified and provided for GO staff. Winnicott (1971) first introduced the transitional object concept as a means to support individuals during a transition or change. As observed during the quantitative and qualitative analyses, the transitional object is vitally important as a defense against anxiety and withdrawal and should be tailored to each individual’s unique needs (Grady & Grady, 2013). For example, staff should be permitted to bring items and keepsakes from GO’s former headquarters to their new space at Allied headquarters. Further research has confirmed the importance of these transitional objects and found that when cultural artifacts are utilized by top managers there is a much higher likelihood of a successful transformation (Soonsawad, 2010).

### **Implementation of Recommendations**

We recommend a continuous, customized change model to address the unique needs of GO. At the core of the model are the people, processes, and tools that would fuel the cycles of continuous improvement. This is especially relevant for a multinational organization like GO. This change cycle includes the following steps: *Assess, Design, Implement, Manage Change*, and *Evaluate*. The specific recommendations for the core elements of the model as well as the steps of the change cycle are detailed below.

**Core elements.** The TMT (Duck, 1993) that would drive the change will offer the hierarchical leadership to which a bureaucratic culture is accustomed. The process for the change needs to include clear direction from the TMT as well as the flexibility to learn, adapt, and use an improvisational approach based on lessons learned from one another (Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997).

**Assess.** This step includes getting the attention of the organization's employees (Neilson et al., 2005) and making them aware of the challenges at hand. This step must also include encouraging honest, engaged feedback that will give a real, authentic picture of the impact of the change and what needs to be addressed. The LOE Index<sup>®</sup> provides the “as is” state and helps GO understand its current needs.

**Design.** A clearly defined strategic plan will aid GO in moving towards the “to be” state. Additionally, GO may benefit from bringing in “new blood” (Neilson, Pasternack, & Van Nuys, 2005), either from an internal resource or from outside support that can offer fresh insight into the design of the change. Furthermore, the plan should focus on results rather than processes as this will focus efforts and not restrict creative approaches toward realizing the goal (Schaffer & Thompson, 1992). Lastly, the design of the change should include the long-term goals and a vision that will inspire employees to keep improving in the short term (Collins & Porras, 1996).

**Implement.** Initially, focus groups should be created to test new processes on small, achievable tasks that are clear and measurable. Moving forward, an improvisational approach to change should be used to allow exchange of knowledge and best practices (Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997).

**Manage change.** The TMT will manage the overall change effort and ensure collaboration. There is a strong positive relationship between an organization that is adaptable and strong employee commitment (Nongo & Ikyanyon, 2012). The ability to manage change successfully will lead to higher commitment and less turnover within the organization.

**Evaluate.** The final step of the continuous change cycle is to reevaluate the process and results achieved so that the leadership knows which new structures to keep and which to discard (Schaffer & Thompson, 1992). This information can then inform the next cycle of continuous improvement.

### **Implications for Other Multinational Organizations**

There are risks that GO faces if it does not successfully implement these steps of the change cycle that also apply to other global organizations. It is important to evaluate these areas of concern in order to stress the need for GO to implement these recommendations to stay relevant, and for other global organizations to learn from GO's experiences.

**Risk of losing resources.** Many issues related to culture, politics, HR, and structure were discovered through the quantitative and qualitative analyses and all reveal one underlying theme: *GO does not have a clear identity, which has caused major barriers to their partnership with Allied.* Since the merger, the formerly independent GO has struggled to find its identity within

Allied. If it cannot demonstrate its value to Allied, it may lose critical financial resources and compromise long-term sustainability.

**Emotional risks to employees: Anaclitic depression.** GO displays signs of *anaclitic depression*, which is defined as a “form of melancholia often experienced when the individuals, organizations, or belief systems that we lean on or are dependent on for emotional support are withdrawn from us” (Harvey, 1999, p. 112). GO has been leaning on its pre-merger mission statement, which is no longer relevant. Morale and enthusiasm are low and employees are experiencing anaclitic depression over the loss of GO’s distinct mission and identity. This has created multiple competing agendas as individuals attempt to deal with the loss in their own way.

Some individuals, unsympathetic to the feelings of loss experienced by others, want to eliminate previous identifiers, such as GO’s headquarters, without providing sufficient time to grieve. As discovered during our interviews, turnover in GO is high, which creates a lack of continuity, further preventing GO from understanding its purpose and addressing its issues.

**Power struggle within the organization.** Goss, Pascale, and Athos (1998) claimed that perceiving without discussing is far more harmful to an organization than a threat that is stated. GO has continually put “Band-Aids®” on issues instead of addressing the deeper root causes. GO’s leaders are at odds with one another rather than coming together as allies, severely impeding progress. This passive-aggressive struggle for control prevents employees from overtly addressing their individual issues. These power struggles must be addressed and resolved for GO to act as one and move forward.

**Lack of a clearly defined purpose.** The lack of a shared vision, clearly defined roles, and superordinate goals has caused GO employees to operate with the mentality of “every staff member for his- or herself.” Brown and Wade (1987) found that role ambiguity decreases harmony between group members when a task is salient. GO is struggling with task salience, and the lack of defined roles within leadership positions creates a chaotic environment (Brown & Wade, 1987). GO’s mission cannot be refined unless the leadership is willing to work together to agree on specific goals. A sense of urgency needs to be created within GO for employees to understand that if they want to save their organization, the status quo must be disrupted.

GO must also realize that their funding is at risk if they continue to operate without a plan. As indicated in several interviews, without a plan, they lack an identifiable product, and without a definitive product, no member country is going to provide funding.

### **Limitations**

Although the survey response rate was comparable to most organizational surveys, some employees may have been reluctant to participate for political reasons. Even though surveyed anonymously, our experience indicates that social desirability and confirmation biases are typically present in some capacity when collecting survey data within organizations. Lastly, the cross-sectional design of this study did not allow us to observe phenomena as they developed. A longitudinal design where constructs are measured at different points in time would yield more valuable data with regard to the development of symptoms. We recommend resurveying the staff after the change process has had time to evolve and comparing the two sets of results.

## Conclusion

The need to change is constant. Globally diverse organizations are particularly susceptible to organizational challenges consistent with change. One significant factor is the role of culture. Different cultures introduce a unique dynamic to the change strategy. Not only does strategy need to comprehensively support the process of implementing change, but it also must account for and support the unique cultures that collectively define global organizations. This highlights the value of approaching change with multicultural organizations by defining a customized strategy that adjusts for cultural nuances. This study accomplished that goal by identifying the recommendations through qualitative and quantitative data collection techniques that supported the ability to triangulate results and identify broad strategy drawing from multiple change methodologies.

It is important to underscore GO's unique purpose and identity while fostering integration and unification with Allied. As indicated by Duck (1993), achieving a critical balance during change requires creating the right organizational context, managing emotional connections, and holistically integrating these dynamic components. GO needs to develop and communicate its vision and identity while aligning it with the overall goals, mission, and structure of Allied. Integration with Allied will not only improve communication and interrelationships between the two organizations but will also ameliorate the financial constraints experienced by both entities in funding GO.

By culturally, psychologically, and physically integrating with Allied, GO can benefit from Allied's existing infrastructure, HR functions, technology services, and public relations. Given the upcoming changes in leadership and disruption that it and the integration will inevitably bring, it is critical for the TMT to deliver culturally competent, inclusive, and tailored support to GO's employees. Doing so will not only benefit the organizational system but the larger collective that it serves.

We expect that this analysis and its recommendations will assist GO in its continuing change initiatives. The customized change strategy, rooted in the work of many established theorists (Duck, 1993; Harvey, 1999; Hofstede, 1980; Kotter, 1995), will enable the implementation method to be adapted to GO's unique multinational community. There are many risks associated with non-implementation—especially in today's constantly changing global environment. Therefore, without a customizable and continuous change approach that addresses the unique needs of the individuals and cultures involved, it is likely that the change initiative will fail. Furthermore, these findings pose key implications for other multinational organizations to consider as they craft tailored change management plans to help navigate the organization through times of uncertainty.

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English Abstract

# The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations

## A Case Study

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### Abstract

Graduate students and faculty at The George Washington University (GWU) partnered with Global Organization (GO) to identify and ameliorate challenges related to the rapid cycling of organizational change. The purpose of this case study was to gather a baseline of individual symptoms and their impact on organizational attitudes to develop an informed and defined action plan for continuing transitions. Research was conducted to improve the overall effectiveness of GO, which is renowned for its unique identity and international relationships, as well as to create a customized method for maintaining organizational effectiveness through transitions. Results of both qualitative and quantitative analyses are presented. The discussion includes comprehensive recommendations and implementation strategies that can enable GO to successfully redefine its mission and address any critical organizational symptoms. The implications of the current study may also prove relevant for other global organizations faced with continuous change.

**Keywords:** Organizational Change, Trust, Effectiveness, Resistance, Culture, Change Success

French Abstract\*

The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations: A Case Study

# Le défi du changement pour les organisations multinationales

## Une étude de cas

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### Résumé

Les diplômés et professeurs de l'Université George Washington ont conclu un partenariat avec le "Global Organization" (GO) pour identifier et améliorer les défis liés à la rapidité des cycles de changement organisationnel. Le but de cette étude est de recueillir des données de référence sur les symptômes individuels et leur impact sur les attitudes organisationnelles, pour élaborer un plan d'action pour des transitions organisationnelles continues. La recherche a été menée pour améliorer l'efficacité globale de GO, qui est réputé pour son identité unique et ses relations internationales, ainsi que de créer une méthode pour le maintien d'une efficacité organisationnelle grâce aux transitions continues. Les résultats de deux analyses qualitatives et quantitatives sont présentés. La discussion comprend des recommandations et des stratégies de mise en œuvre qui peuvent permettre GO de redéfinir sa mission et de traiter les symptômes organisationnels critiques. Les implications de cette étude peuvent également se révéler utiles pour d'autres organisations mondiales face au changement continu.

**Mots-clés:** Changement organisationnel, Confiance, Efficacité, Résistance, Culture, Changement, Succès

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German Abstract\*

The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations: A Case Study

# Die Herausforderung der Veränderung für multinationale Organisationen

## Eine Fallstudie

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### Zusammenfassung

Studenten im Aufbaustudium und Lehrkörper der George Washington Universität (GWU) haben sich mit der Global Organization (GO) zusammengeschlossen, um die Herausforderung bezüglich der rapiden organisatorischen Veränderung zu identifizieren und zu verbessern. Der Zweck dieser Fallstudie war eine Grundlinie von individuellen Symptomen und ihrem Einfluss auf die organisatorischen Einstellungen zu erarbeiten, um einen informierten und festgelegten Handlungsplan für kontinuierliche Wechsel zu entwickeln. Die Forschung wurde betrieben um die Gesamteffektivität der GO zu verbessern, die für ihre einzigartige Identität und internationalen Beziehungen bekannt ist, sowie um eine kundenspezifische Methode zu schaffen, um die organisatorische Effektivität durch Wechsel aufrechtzuerhalten. Die Ergebnisse der qualitativen und quantitativen Analysen werden dargestellt. Die Diskussion enthält umfassende Empfehlungen und Implementierungsstrategien, die es der GO ermöglichen, ihre Mission erfolgreich neu zu definieren und sämtliche kritische organisatorische Symptome anzusprechen. Die Auswirkungen der aktuellen Studie können auch relevant für andere globale Organisationen sein, die mit kontinuierlichen Veränderungen konfrontiert sind.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Organisatorische Veränderung; Vertrauen; Wirksamkeit; Widerstand; Kultur; Änderungserfolg.

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Spanish Abstract\*

The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations: A Case Study

# El Reto del Cambio para las Organizaciones Multinacionales

## Caso de Estudio

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### Abstract

Los estudiantes de posgrado y profesores de la Universidad George Washington (GWU) se asociaron con la Organización Mundial (OM) para identificar y mitigar los desafíos relacionados con el ciclo rápido de cambio organizacional. El propósito de este estudio del caso fue reunir una línea de base de los síntomas individuales y su impacto en las actitudes de la organización para desarrollar un plan de acción informada y definida por continuas transiciones. La investigación se llevó a cabo para mejorar la eficacia global de la OM, que es famosa por su identidad única y por sus relaciones internacionales, así como por crear un método personalizado para mantener la eficacia de la organización a través de las transiciones. Se presentan los resultados de los análisis cualitativos y cuantitativos realizados. La discusión incluye recomendaciones integrales y estrategias de aplicación que pueden permitir a la OM redefinir con éxito su misión y abordar cualquier síntoma en organizaciones críticas. Las implicaciones de este estudio también pueden resultar relevantes para otras organizaciones mundiales que se enfrentan con el cambio continuo.

**Keywords:** Cambio Organizacional, Confianza, Eficacia, Resistencia, Cultura, Cambio de Éxito

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Arabic Abstract\*

The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations: A Case Study

## تحدي التغيير الذي تواجهه المنظمات المتعددة الجنسيات: دراسة حالة

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### ملخص

نظم طلاب الدراسات العليا و أعضاء هيئة التدريس في جامعة جورج واشنطن شراكة مع منظمة عالمية من أجل تحديد و تحقيق التحديات المتعلقة السريعة في التغيير التنظيمي. كان الغرض من دراسة هذه الحالة جمع معلومات أساسية عن الأفراد و دراسة الجوانب و تأثيرها على المواقف التنظيمية لوضع و تطوير خطة عمل مدروسة و محددة عن التحولات المستمرة . تم اجراء هذا البحث من أجل استغلال و تحسين اجمالي فعالية المنظمة العالمية , و التي تمتاز بهوية فريدة لا نظير لها في العلاقات الدولية , إضافة الى تطوير و خلق طرق مخصصة للحفاظ على الفعالية التنظيمية خلال فترة التحول .نتائج التحليلات النوعية و الكمية تم تقديمها في نهاية الدراسة حيث تشمل توصيات شاملة و استراتيجيات التنفيذ التي يمكن ان تمكن المنظمة العالمية من اعادة تعريف مهمتها بنجاح و معالجة أي أعراض تنظيمية حرجة . ان الآثار المترتبة على هذه الدراسة الحالية قد تكون متصلة مع منظمات عالمية اخرى كانت قد واجهت مثل هذه التحديات مع التغيير المستمر .

**الكلمات الدالة:** التغيير التنظيمي, الثقة, الفعالية, مقاومة التغيير, ثقافة, نجاح التغيير

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Italian Abstract\*

The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations: A Case Study

## La Sfida per le Aziende Multinazionali un Caso Studio

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### Abstarct

Laureati della facoltà della George Town University hanno fatto una partnership con aduate students and faculty at The George Washington University (GWU) partnered con la Global Organization (GO) per identificare e migliorare le sfide riguardanti i rapidi cicli del cambiamento organizzativo. Le scopo di questo caso studio era di raccogliere una base di sintomi individuali e i loro impatti sugli atteggiamenti organizzativi per sviluppare un solido piano d'azione riguardo alle continue transizioni. La ricerca è stata condotta per migliorare la complessiva efficacia della GO che è conosciuta per la sua identità internazionale distintiva e i rapporti internazionali, ed è stata condotta anche per sviluppare metodi personalizzati per mantenere efficacia organizzativa anche durante i cambiamenti. I risultati sono sia qualitativi che quantitativi. Lo studio comprende raccomandazioni e implementazioni strategiche che possono dare alla GO lo spunto per ridefinire in modo efficace la propria missione e confrontarsi con ciascun sintomo organizzativo. Le implicazioni di questo studio possono essere riscontrate come rilevanti anche per altre aziende globali che si confrontano con il cambiamento continuo.

**Parole chiave:** cambiamento organizzativo, fiducia, efficacia, resistenza, cultura, cambiamento, successo

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Chinese Abstract\*

## The Challenge of Change for Multinational Organizations: A Case Study

# 变革跨国企业来的挑战：案例研究

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### [摘要]

在乔治华盛顿大学（GWU）的研究生和教师与全球组织（GO）合作，缓解其由快速循环的组织变革带来的挑战。本案例研究的目的在于收集个人对变革的反应及其对企业组织的态度的影响，进而为其转型开发一个适宜的且已界定好的计划。本研究改善GO的整体效益，即其独特的身份和国际关系；以及提供一个保障整体效益的定制方法。本文提供了定性和定量分析的结果。在讨论中，我们涵盖了综合性建议和实施策略。这些建议和策略可以使GO成功地重新定义自己的使命，并缓解其重要的组织症状。本研究还可以应用到其它面对着不断变革的全球性组织。

关键词：组织变革，信任，有效性，反对，文化，变革，成功]

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