The cultural change work of change agents without formal authority: Integrating sustainability into an organization’s culture

Simon Pek

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Approval

Name: Simon Pek
Degree: Doctor of Philosophy
Title: The cultural change work of change agents without formal authority: Integrating sustainability into an organization’s culture

Examining Committee: Chair: Peter Klein
Professor

Dr. Stephanie Bertels
Senior Supervisor
Associate Professor

Dr. Jennifer Howard-Grenville
Supervisor
Diageo Reader in Management Studies
University of Cambridge

Dr. Brent Lyons
Supervisor
Assistant Professor

Dr. Eric Werker
Internal Examiner
Associate Professor

Dr. Alan Meyer
External Examiner
Professor Emeritus
Lundquist College of Business
University of Oregon

Date Defended/Approved: April 19, 2017
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Abstract

Organizations are increasingly engaging in efforts to change their cultures. Reflecting this practitioner interest, scholars have explored how organizations can change their cultures, and the everyday actions of employees, to address concerns and opportunities including safety, sustainability, and diversity. Yet much research to date on the microprocesses of culture change focuses on the work of senior leaders, who tend to have the important advantage of formal authority, and on the catalyzing roles of crises and social transformations. We know relatively little about the microprocesses of cultural change, particularly when undertaken by individuals without formal authority.

In my dissertation, I seek to shed light on the work undertaken by change agents to support cultural change, what I refer to as cultural change work. Drawing on recent research on work, I conceptualize cultural change work as effortful actions to integrate focal element(s) into other elements of an organization’s culture. Adopting an emergent and inductive research strategy, I study the cultural change work of a team of change agents rolling out a sustainability-oriented cultural change initiative at ManufactureCo, a North America-based global technology manufacturing company. Based on my analysis, I developed two pathways of cultural change – the cultural elevation pathway, and the cultural integration pathway – both of which are underpinned by different forms of direct cultural change work. I also identified three forms of indirect cultural change work, which refers to efforts to improve one’s capacity to undertake direct cultural change work, and unpacked the mechanisms through which each can support, and is in turn supported by, direct cultural change work.

My dissertation makes three contributions to research on organizational culture and cultural change work. First, it expands our understanding of factors that constrain and enable the deployment of culture. Second, it lends insights into how change agents can improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work through engaging in indirect cultural change work. Third, it expands our understanding of the nature of cultural change work by pointing to the effects of tailored versus broad work. Collectively, these contributions paint a picture of change agents as savvy navigators of culture that combine an appreciation for their organization’s culture with a diverse repertoire of cultural change work. My dissertation also makes numerous contributions to practice, providing change agents and designers of cultural change initiatives with specific guidance on how to structure their initiatives and how to successfully affect changes in meanings and actions.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to Jiri and Katerina Pek. Throughout my entire life, both of you have instilled in me a deep appreciation for how fortunate I am to be able to learn and express anything I want, and how important it is to not take this for granted and use it to make the world a better place. I will forever be indebted to you both for the tremendous sacrifices you made to be able to give me this gift, and for always being there for me in your own special ways.
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List of Definitions

Cultural change work: Effortful actions to integrate focal element(s) into other elements of an organization’s culture.

Broad meaning-making work: Efforts to advance interpretations of a focal meaning, targeted broadly throughout the organization, typically through indirect interactions.

Cultural elevation: The attribution of greater prominence and importance to a particular focal meaning.

Peripheral actions: Actions undertaken by employees that relate to a focal meaning but do not involve their core work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.

Broad support work: Creating an underlying supportive infrastructure that enables employees to undertake actions related to a focal meaning.

Tailored meaning-making work: Efforts to advance interpretations of a focal meaning, customized to a particular audience, typically through direct interactions.

Cultural integration: The integration of a focal meaning into other meanings that comprise the organization’s culture.

Integrated actions: Actions undertaken by employees that relate to the focal meaning and involve their core work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.

Tailored support work: Work undertaken to enable others to undertake actions related to a focal meaning, customized to employees’ individual work.

Indirect cultural change work: Effortful actions undertaken by individuals to develop and improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work more effectively.

Change agent legitimacy-gaining work: Work undertaken by change agents to increase others’ perception that they and their actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate.

Preparatory work: Individual cognitive work aimed at constructing cultural change interactions.

Relational work: Efforts to cultivate and develop relationships internally and externally that are relevant to the cultural change initiative.
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“I observed that there was a real concern among some people, members of organizations as well as researchers, for helping to create meaningful experiences at work. For some it was a concern with the question of what the meaning of life in organizations might be; for others it was a sense that there was little, or insufficient, meaning to life in organizations and that we really ought to do something about this […] It seems to me that an idea such as organizational culture might be very appropriate as a vehicle for exploring and understanding life at work, and for making it more humane, more meaningful. It has stirred some real optimism in me.” – Pelican (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg, & Martin, 1985: 21)

“When I went to talk to [an employee] about [sustainability] in a one-on-one, he said, ‘I don’t want to recycle bottles or weave mats out of milk bags. I get it, but A) it’s small impact, B) it’s on my own time. Why can’t I do sustainability in my role?’ And I said, well, welcome to Green Future. That’s exactly what we’re about” (Change Agent).

As their environments evolve, organizations are increasingly engaging in efforts to change their cultures (Helms Mills, 2003). Reflecting this practitioner interest, recent research explores how organizations can change their cultures, and the everyday actions of employees, in order to address concerns and opportunities including safety (Singer & Vogus, 2013), sustainability (Howard-Grenville & Bertels, 2012), diversity (Pless & Maak, 2004), and process reliability (Roberts, Rousseau, & La Porte, 1994). For example, Horizon Utilities, an Ontario-based electricity distribution company, saw shifting its corporate culture as a crucial impetus to integrating sustainability throughout its operations (Berthall & Network for Business Sustainability, 2016). Changing an organization’s culture, however, is challenging (Trice & Beyer, 1993), risky (Krefting & Frost, 1985), and prone to failure (Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). Smith’s (2003) review of prior work suggests that initiatives to change an organization’s culture have a success rate of between 10 and 32%.

To date, much of the literature on culture change focuses on the role and impact of crises (e.g. Siehl, 1985) and periods of social transformation (e.g. Swidler, 1986) in initiating culture change. Furthermore, most research has tended to focus on the work
of senior leaders in driving culture change (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007; Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011). While there is a growing recognition that culture is continuously being renegotiated as employees interact (Brannen & Salk, 2000; Fine, 2012; Fine & Hallett, 2014; Harrington & Fine, 2006) and that these interactions may be driven by individuals outside of senior leadership positions (Hallett, 2003; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), we know little about the microprocesses of how organizational culture changes (Morrill, 2008; Thomas, Sargent, & Hardy, 2010), particularly when driven by individuals outside of senior leadership positions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011). A greater knowledge of how change agents can engender culture change in their organizations would have important benefits for scholars and practitioners alike. In my dissertation, I seek to shed light on the work undertaken by change agents to support cultural change, what I refer to as cultural change work.

I pause here to clarify my distinction between the terms culture change and cultural change. The term culture change is often used to draw attention to large-scale shifts in which an organization’s culture changes to include new elements, with old elements being destroyed or displaced (Trice & Beyer, 1993). Trice and Beyer (1993: 396) identify three forms of culture change, all of which share this overall focus on shifts in the composition of an organizational culture:

“(1) revolutionary and comprehensive efforts to change the cultures of entire organizations; (2) efforts confined largely to changing specific subcultures or subunits within organizations; and (3) efforts that are gradual and incremental, but nevertheless cumulate in a comprehensive reshaping of an entire organization’s culture.”
In contrast, building on recent work, I adopt the perspective of cultural change (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), a more micro perspective that focuses more on the processes of integration of various elements of culture. An example of such an approach is Harrison and Corley’s (2011) study of the process of cultural infusion, which involves the gradual integration of elements of a broader societal culture into an organization’s culture. As such, my dissertation focuses more on the micro level and on the integration of cultural elements into an organization’s culture rather than the destruction or replacement of cultural elements.

In order to gain this deeper understanding of the microprocesses of cultural change, my dissertation focuses broadly on investigating the various forms of cultural change work of individuals and the mechanisms through which this work engenders cultural change. Drawing on Barley and Kunda’s (2001) and Phillips and Lawrence’s (2012) conceptualizations of work, I define cultural change work as effortful actions to integrate focal element(s) into other elements of an organization’s culture.¹ These elements may include assumptions, values, meanings, and concepts, which can be new or an existing part of an organization’s culture. Adopting an explicit focus on work draws

¹ My conceptualization of cultural change work shares some similarities with other forms of work identified by scholars. Conceptually, it is similar to the concept of culture change work introduced but not explicitly defined by Alvesson and Sveningsson (2007), as both deal in some way with changes to an organization’s culture. It differs in that my use of cultural change work has a more specific focus on the process of integration of various elements of culture. Furthermore, it is similar to some forms of work identified by Phillips and Lawrence (2012) in that it is socially constituted and symbolic, yet it differs in its domain and scope. For instance, Phillips and Lawrence (2012: 225) define cultural work as “action by actors to align themselves with prevailing societal preferences and tastes or attempts by actors to shape cultural tastes and preferences, which deal with the notion of culture, but is more macro and less focused on the integration of cultural elements than my conceptualization of cultural change work. Similarly, it differs from Perkmann and Spicer’s (2008: 818) conceptualization of cultural work, which they argue “involves presenting an institution in a way that appeals to a wider audience beyond those who have an immediate interest or technical stake in an institution”, as this concept doesn’t have a focus on culture change more broadly, or the integration of elements into a culture, specifically.
attention to an in-depth examination of the actions undertaken by actors, how they are influenced by their context, and how they may engender changes in their context (Lawrence, Suddaby, & Leca, 2009; Phillips & Lawrence, 2012). I specifically focus on the cultural change work of internal change agents—individuals directly employed by an organization who are tasked with managing and implementing change initiatives (Caldwell, 2003; Ottaway, 1983) but who typically do not hold formal authority over those they attempt to influence (Balogun, Gleadle, Hailey, & Willmott, 2005).

I adopt a specific conceptualization of organizational culture, which I introduce here and describe further in the literature review. I conceptualize culture as consisting of the meanings collectively available to and shared by a group (Alvesson, 2013; Patterson, 2014; Smircich, 1983). My use of the term shared is similar to that of Patterson (2014), who argues that a shared meaning is one that is known among members of a group. While there is a wide range of theoretical perspectives and assumptions about the malleability and functioning of organizational culture (Martin, 2002; Meek, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987), particularly whether culture is a constitutive or regulative force (Weber & Dacin, 2011), in my dissertation I follow Alvesson (2013) and adopt a perspective that culture can both enable and constrain action. Further, I draw from a practice perspective, according to which there is the recurrent relationship between individuals’ actions and their broader social context (Feldman & Orlikowski, 2011). When applied to the domain of organizational culture, this perspective would suggest that there is a mutually constitutive relationship between meanings and the actions individuals engage in during their everyday work: individuals’ actions shape meanings, which in turn shapes individuals’ actions (Giorgi, Lockwood, &
Glynn, 2015). Through their practices and interactions, individuals can engender changes in meanings (Fine, 1984; Hallett, 2003). As employees gain access to new meanings, they can put them to use in crafting their workplace actions (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Swidler, 1986, 2001; Weber & Dacin, 2011), which in turn may reinforce and adapt meanings in a mutually constitutive manner (Canato, Ravasi, & Phillips, 2013). Because this perspective draws analytical attention towards individuals’ situated actions and the interconnections between those actions and meanings, it is well suited to investigating the varied forms and effects of cultural change work. Given my conceptualization of organizational culture, I focus on identifying specific shared meanings, and label the subject of cultural change work as the *focal meaning*.

In order to address the overarching research question that underpins my dissertation, I engaged in a processual, emergent, and inductive study at ManufactureCo,² a North America-based global technology manufacturing company. ManufactureCo undertook a company-wide cultural change initiative aimed at integrating sustainability (which is the specific focal meaning I study in the case of ManufactureCo) into its organizational culture and the daily work of its employees. The cultural change initiative was rolled out by a team of change agents who, throughout the process, did not have formal authority over the employees with whom they were interacting. This research site thus provides an ideal context in which to investigate the microprocesses of cultural change driven by individuals outside of senior leadership positions. Furthermore, researching cultural change in this context enables me to

² In order to protect participants’ confidentiality, the names of all companies, sites, departments, positions, initiatives, and individuals are pseudonyms, and some personal identifiers have been changed.
contribute to the literature on sustainability. Sustainability is growing in importance in the mainstream business literature, with scholars calling for more nuanced insights into the process of integrating sustainability into organizations’ cultures and employees’ daily actions (Harris & Crane, 2002; Howard-Grenville & Bertels, 2012; Howard-Grenville, Bertels, & Lahneman, 2014; Manika, Wells, Gregory-Smith, & Gentry, 2015; Russell & McIntosh, 2011).

Based on my data analysis, I developed two inductively-derived pathways of cultural change – the cultural elevation pathway, and the cultural integration pathway – both of which are underpinned by different forms of direct cultural change work. In the cultural elevation pathway, change agents engender the attribution of greater prominence and importance to a focal meaning through broad meaning-making work by augmenting employees’ specific interpretations of the focal meaning. For instance, in the case of ManufactureCo, employees’ interpretations that sustainability is a strategic priority and source of pride were augmented over time. This elevation of the focal meaning equips employees to increase their engagement in peripheral actions, which refer to actions undertaken by employees that relate to a focal meaning but do not involve their core tasks, roles, and/or expertise (e.g. increased recycling). Change agents’ broad support work, in which they create an underlying supportive infrastructure that enables employees to undertake actions related to a focal meaning, helps enable employees to deploy their elevated focal meaning in peripheral actions. Finally, successful engagement in peripheral actions reinforces the elevation of the focal meaning through a process of cultural reinforcement.
In the cultural integration pathway, change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work, which fosters cultural integration by building connections between the focal meaning and other meanings comprising an organization’s culture. It does so by building connections between the focal meaning and employees’ work in ways that are specific, grounded, and tangible. In the case of ManufactureCo, in pockets of the organization, sustainability increasingly became integrated with other meanings, including ‘customer orientation’ and ‘innovation in a box’. Cultural integration equips employees to engage in integrated actions, which are related to a focal meaning but differ from peripheral actions in that they involve employees’ core daily work and/or expertise (e.g. integrating sustainability considerations into sales pitches and customer communications). Change agents can also engage in tailored support work – work undertaken to enable others to undertake actions related to a focal meaning, customized to employees’ individual work – that influences employees’ engagement in integrated actions in two ways: by enabling employees to deploy their newly-integrated meanings, and by dampening the potentially constraining effects of a selection of other meanings. Similar to the cultural elevation pathway, employees’ successful engagement in integrated actions reinforces cultural integration through a process of cultural reinforcement.

In addition, when analyzing factors that can help increase the effectiveness of change agents’ direct cultural change work, I identified three forms of indirect cultural change work – efforts to improve one’s capacity to undertake direct cultural change work – and unpacked the mechanisms through which each can support, and is in turn supported by, direct cultural change work. Change agents can engage in change agent
legitimacy-gaining work, preparatory work, and relational work, which collectively support direct cultural change work by increasing their access to resources, increasing their symbolic power, increasing their access to interactions, and increasing the applicability of their direct cultural change work. Direct cultural change work can in turn support indirect cultural change work by providing change agents with the resources with which to craft their indirect cultural change work. It can also directly increase change agents’ legitimacy.

My dissertation makes three contributions to the evolving research conversations on organizational culture and cultural change work. First, it expands our understanding of factors that constrain and enable the deployment of culture. I demonstrate how existing elements of an organization’s culture can constrain the deployment of culture, how change agents’ support work can facilitate employees’ deployment of culture, and how employees can gain experience deploying new and enhanced elements of their culture in the absence of invoking liminality. Second, it lends insights into how change agents can improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work. I identify three forms of indirect cultural change work, expand our understanding of how change agents can gain legitimacy, and point to the reciprocal link between direct and indirect work. Third and finally, it expands our understanding of cultural change work by demonstrating how the degree of tailoring of cultural change work matters for outcomes of cultural change initiatives.

My dissertation proceeds as follows. In Chapter 2, I situate my dissertation within the existing body of research investigating organizational culture and cultural change. Specifically, I review the literature discussing what culture is, how culture relates to
action, and whether and how culture can be changed. In doing so, I clarify how and why I conceptualize organizational culture as I do, and describe how my dissertation fits within ongoing theoretical and practical puzzles. In Chapter 3, I describe the methods I use to investigate my research question. Specifically, I describe my research strategy, research context, data sources, approach to data analysis, and the strategies I adopt for ensuring rigour. In Chapter 4, I present my findings, beginning with a description of ManufactureCo’s culture and an overall narrative of the rollout and implementation of Green Future, and continuing by developing theory about cultural change work and cultural change by drawing on my analysis of the various forms of work undertaken by Green Future’s internal change agents. In Chapter 5, I situate my findings in the broader conversation on organizational culture and cultural change work, discussing how my findings contribute to this work and how they might influence future theoretical and empirical work, and detailing how my dissertation might contribute to practice. Finally, in Chapter 6, I briefly conclude my dissertation.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

“I heard one astute person at a conference on the topic of organizational culture make the observation that culture has a different meaning for each person who uses it, that perhaps we need about a dozen words for it, just as the Eskimos have for the word ‘snow.’” – Eagle (Frost et al., 1985: 19)

Organizational culture has been defined and conceptualized in many ways (Meek, 1988; Meyerson & Martin, 1987). Weeks (2004: 31) notes that “culture is notoriously polysemic […] not only does culture mean different things to different people, but it also means different things to the same people.” There is debate over what exactly constitutes culture and what its constituent elements are (Alvesson, 2013; Martin, 2002), and there is a variety of perspectives about the dynamics of culture (Weber & Dacin, 2011) and whether or not it can be changed (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002; Ogbonna & Wilkinson, 2003). Despite this often vigorous debate, scholars tend to agree on several points: that culture is a collective phenomenon, emotionally charged, historically based, dynamic, inherently fuzzy, and inherently symbolic (Trice & Beyer, 1993). In this section, I review prior work on organizational culture, the dynamics of organizational culture, and on cultural change in order to be clear about how I conceptualize these concepts and to situate my dissertation within prior work. I focus on clarity because, as Jermier, Slocum Jr., Fry, and Gaines (1991: 171) note, “in any single study it is impossible to model organizational culture completely”. Clarity and precision in how a researcher conceptualizes and studies culture can help overcome the concept being “used to cover everything and consequently nothing” (Alvesson, 2013: 3) and can also help ensure that one’s definition of culture is closely linked to how it is studied, as recommended by Martin (2002).
2.1 Conceptualizing Organizational Culture

When scholars study organizational culture, they generally distinguish between the ideational and material elements of the concept. Ideational elements “emphasize subjective interpretations” (Martin, 2002: 56) and are often intangible and invisible (Jermier et al., 1991). Ideational elements of culture can include meanings, beliefs, values, and assumptions (Alvesson, 2013; Jermier et al., 1991; Martin, 2002). Material elements – also referred to as cultural forms (Trice & Beyer, 1993) – differ from ideational elements in that they are more tangible (Jermier et al., 1991) and can be described in objectivist terms (Martin, 2002). Trice and Beyer (1993: 77) note that “they consist of observable entities through which members of a culture express, affirm, and communicate cultural substance to one another.” Examples of material elements from these and other authors include actions, practices, language, dress, language, stories, and rituals.

Scholars differ in how they intertwine material and ideational elements in their conceptualizations of culture. Some scholars include material elements in their definitions of culture, while others include only ideational elements while still investigating their connection with material elements (Martin, 2002). Within the latter approach, “culture consists of the ideational elements […] that emerge to explain and reinforce and explain a materialist base” (Martin, 2002: 59). An example of a study adopting the former approach is the study undertaken by Jermier and colleagues (1991), in which the authors analyzed the differences between an official, espoused version of culture and various subcultures, while an example of the latter approach is
Alvesson and Sveningsson’s (2007) study of culture change, in which the authors investigate how various actors try to bring about culture change in a high-tech company.

In my dissertation, I broadly adopt Gregory’s (1983: 364) definition that “a culture is conceptualized as a system of meanings that accompany the myriad of behaviors and practices recognized as a distinct way of life [...] much of the system must be considered as being made up of implicit meanings that motivate behavior”. Specifically, I conceptualize organizational culture as, at its core, consisting of the meanings available to and shared by members of a group. Shared meanings refer to interpretations of and ways of relating to objects, actions, and expressions (Alvesson, 2013) that are known (Patterson, 2014), generated, and emerge within a collective (Alvesson & Berg, 1992). I also adopt the perspective that culture consists primarily of ideational elements that are intrinsically connected with material elements, particularly actions, which in the case of ManufactureCo appeared to be the most salient material element of culture. I adopt this approach as it draws attention to the dynamic interplay between changes in meanings and actions, a practice recommended by scholars of culture change (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007).

2.2 The Dynamics of Organizational Culture

While there is no consensus about the specific definition of organizational culture, or which elements of it scholars choose to focus on, there is also no consensus about the dynamics of organizational culture, particularly in terms of the interplay between culture and action. Weber and Dacin (2011) describe two waves in the research on organizational culture related to the dynamics of culture. In the first wave,
culture was seen as a force that molds and restrains employees’ actions: in much research during this wave, “culture became associated with fairly stable, encompassing, and often internalized constraints on individual thought and action” (Weber & Dacin, 2011: 287). Trice and Beyer’s (1993: 34 emphasis in original) discussion of Max Weber’s *The Protestant Ethic* is a good example of research within this first wave. In analyzing Weber’s study, the authors argue that:

“Through norms, ideologies often compel people to action. When people believe behavior A will lead to outcome B and they prefer outcome B to other possible outcomes for themselves and others, they are likely to feel compelled to exhibit behavior A and urge others to do so as well. Most Calvinists worked hard because this was the accepted way to demonstrate that they were among the chosen. The belief system was so strong that *not* to do so involved outcomes too threatening for most people to even consider.”

A major difference between the first wave and the second wave is the latter’s emphasis on individuals’ agency in deploying culture, according to which “individuals and organizations […] use cultural materials as a pragmatic resource” (Weber & Dacin, 2011: 287–288). Within the second wave, individuals’ “agency is made possible by theorizing culture less as a tightly interlocked ‘web of meaning’ and more as a reservoir of relatively small and independent ‘bits of meaning’” (Weber & Dacin, 2011: 289). This perspective draws from Swidler’s (1986) insights that culture shapes action by providing the resources and tools with which individuals can construct their actions rather than by specifying values that guide actions. Taking a different perspective than that articulated by Trice and Beyer (1993), Swidler (2001: 86–87) argues that

“Values are important. But values are not the reason why a person develops one strategy of action rather than another. They are not, so to speak, the originator of the chain of ‘reasons’ why someone acts as she does. Instead, values are one of many cultural resources, like other skills and habits, that allow persons to enact strategies of action.”
Cultural toolkits – also referred to as repertoires – contain cultural materials that are available to individuals and groups (Swidler, 1986; Weber, 2005). According to this perspective, as individuals in a collective gain exposure to new meanings, they can selectively put these meanings to use in addressing various situations (DiMaggio, 1997; Giorgi et al., 2015). For instance, the expansion of an organization’s culture to include the concepts that products can be seen as a form of art and that the form of a product is valuable can enable employees in an organization to engage in the development of a more varied range of products (Rindova, Dalpiaz, & Ravasi, 2011). In this sense, changes in the meanings known to a group of employees can enable employees to engage in new actions, and these actions can develop into a strategy of action (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011), which refers to a “a general way of organizing action” (Swidler, 1986: 277) and can become habitual ways of addressing situations (Bertels, Howard-Grenville, & Pek, 2016). Yet the converse is also possible—that employees’ engagement in new actions can engender changes in their shared meanings (Giorgi et al., 2015). For instance, Canato and colleagues (2013) found that employees’ engagement in a practice with low initial fit with their organization’s culture resulted in changes in both the culture and the practice. In this sense, there are likely to be dynamic, reciprocal links between culture and action. Overall, adopting this perspective can be a powerful lens for studying cultural change work as it draws attention to the forms and effects of mundane, situated, and daily interactions and the interconnections between those actions and culture (Giorgi et al., 2015; Hallett, 2003; Harrison & Corley, 2011; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011).
While this perspective has been growing in popularity, it has also been critiqued for not paying enough attention to culture’s potential regulative functions (Alvesson, 2013). Alvesson (2013: 39) argues that “culture makes certain actions possible and in this sense is a competence, resource and even a tool, but culture also constrains and controls—key aspects missed by the toolkit metaphor.” In this dissertation, I adopt the perspective that culture can have both constitutive and regulative functions. When applied to my conceptualization of culture, this perspective suggests that shared meanings can both enable and constrain changes in actions as employees deploy the new meanings within their work, and also that meanings could be changed and adapted through employees’ actions.

It is important to note that, while scholars are embracing the practice perspective on culture and beginning to investigate the reciprocal link between shared meanings and action, there are several questions that warrant additional investigation. Important puzzles stemming from this perspective include how individuals select which resources to deploy (Giorgi et al., 2015; Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010), and what factors might constrain individuals’ agency in deploying resources (Weber & Dacin, 2011). Scholars have begun answering these questions, finding, for example, that specific cultural cues such as the media (DiMaggio, 1997) and “opportunities and constraints” (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000, cited in Giorgi et al., 2015: 16) influence which resources individuals choose to deploy in specific contexts, and that a lack of access to political resources can hinder one’s ability to deploy cultural resources (Kellogg, 2011). In addition, there may be other factors, including forms of cultural change work, that may drive or
constrain the selection and deployment of newly-integrated shared meanings into employees’ actions.

2.3 (How) Can Organizational Culture Be Changed?

A final area of debate relevant to my dissertation concerns whether culture change and cultural change are possible, and if so, who can change an organization’s culture and how. There has been much debate about whether or not culture can be consciously managed (e.g. Harris & Ogbonna, 1999; Ogbonna & Harris, 1998). Reflecting on this question, Martin (1985: 95) argues that it is “a question with the capacity to annoy anyone seriously interested in the topic. Cultural pragmatists and purists, however, find the question annoying for very different reasons.” According to Martin (1985), on one side of the continuum are the pragmatists, who argue that culture change is not only desirable as a means of improving performance, but also that it is indeed possible. On the other side, purists argue that culture cannot be consciously managed and that it, instead, emerges. An example of such a study is Ackroyd and Crowdy’s (1990) study of English slaughtermen, in which the authors find that management was unable to influence the culture and that the primary cultural influences were external to the organization. Between these two extremes, there is a third perspective, which Ogbonna and Harris (2002) term the realist perspective. According to this perspective, conscious changes to culture are seen as possible; however, the possibility for change depends on the scope of the change being attempted (Martin, 1985).
Several studies support this third perspective, and scholars have found that changes to culture are possible, while changing deeper-level elements such as shared assumptions and values may be more difficult (Canato et al., 2013; Harris & Metallinos, 2002; Ogbonna & Harris, 1998). In the same vein as work on culture’s constraining role, scholars have found that existing elements of an organization’s culture can have a constraining role on efforts to manage culture (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007). Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2011) also suggest that much prior work emphasizes that culture may be more malleable when organizations face external jolts or crises. These findings suggest that, while shared values and assumptions may be difficult to change, conscious efforts on the part of change agents to influence the meanings within their organizations outside of times of crisis could be possible. It thus becomes important to investigate the processes of cultural change and evolution at the micro level (Giorgi et al., 2015; Morrill, 2008). And if cultural change is possible, who can engage in it, and how? In the next section, I explore work that has begun exploring this question. As work on cultural change is very limited, I also draw from work on the broader concept of culture change.

Senior leaders as principal cultural change agents. To date, much work that does begin to explore the processes of culture change and cultural change adopts the perspective that culture change is a large-scale “grand technocratic project” (Alvesson, 2013: 186), frequently precipitated by transformational events including major leadership changes (Siehl, 1985) and hostile takeovers (Lundberg, 1985). It has been noted that prior research overwhelmingly focuses on the work of senior leaders (Alvesson, 2013; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011; Meyerson & Martin, 1987; Nord, 1985),
including regional directors (Siehl, 1985), organizational founders (Schein, 1983), divisional heads (Martin & Siehl, 1983), and general managers (Frontiera, 2010). These senior leaders can change their organizations' cultures through, for example, articulating their vision (Bass & Avolio, 1993), redesigning organizational systems and processes (Schein, 1983), or making personnel changes (Frontiera, 2010).

In terms of work specifically focused on sustainability-oriented culture change, Howard-Grenville, Bertels, and Lahneman (2014), in a review of prior work, found that senior leaders can create new roles, selectively frame sustainability, adopt new sustainability standards and programs, and initiate new practices. For instance, senior leaders can emphasize the integration of sustainability into the goals and strategic plans of departments (Smith & Brown, 2003). Recently, Kennedy, Whiteman, and Williams (2015) studied the cultural transformation at the company Interface, finding that the CEO’s strong vision and mission about sustainability and his actions were a powerful driver of changes in the culture and employees’ actions.

While investigating the cultural change work of senior leaders is undoubtedly important, it may be just as important to explore the cultural change work of actors outside of senior leadership positions. When compared to internal change agents, senior leaders often have an important advantage—they often have access to power in the form of formal authority. Scholars have broadly recognized that power is a critical consideration in culture change processes (Alvesson, 2013; Hill & Carley, 2011; Morrill, 2008). Some scholars have gone as far as to suggest that culture change may not be possible without sufficient power on the part of individuals involved in driving culture change initiatives (Lundberg, 1985). Within the body of research on organizational
culture change, formal authority is seen as an important category of power. Formal authority refers to a form of institutionalized power through which individuals – often senior leaders – manage and exert control over lower-ranking individuals (Mechanic, 1962). Formal authority grants individuals the potential for greater influence over an organization’s culture relative to other individuals. Fine and Hallett (2014: 1777) argue that “the choices of one group with authority limit and channel the options of other groups, creating an obdurate field of action.” Similarly, Testa and Sipe (2013: 38) argue that “senior managers may have the greatest impact on an organizations’ culture. Given their ability to control resources and decide on important organizational initiatives, senior leaders should be responsible for actions taken to craft a particular culture.”

In practice, those with higher status and formal authority are often given a disproportionate ability to introduce and advocate for changes to an organization’s culture (Thomas et al., 2010), partially because of the increased focus and attention paid to such individuals by employees (Fine, 1979; Siehl, 1985). Smircich and Morgan (1982: 270) argue that “situations of formal leadership institutionalize this pattern into a system of rights and obligations whereby the leader has the prerogative to define reality, and the led to accept that definition as a frame of reference for orienting their own activity.” While formal authority can no doubt increase an individual’s ability to influence shared meanings, such influence is not assured, and those in positions of formal authority can also have a very minimal impact on employees’ shared meanings (Hallett, 2007). The fact that senior leaders are frequently in positions of formal authority, though, makes them a somewhat unique type of actor, and it is important to also gain
an understanding of the cultural change work of a broader range of actors without such formal authority as they may influence meanings in different ways.

**The (potential) role of other actors in cultural change initiatives.** It has been recognized that individuals outside of senior leadership positions may also influence culture. In reflecting on the link between leadership and culture change, Trice and Beyer (1991: 151) note that:

“Such efforts are not confined to designated leaders or one leader at a time. Rather, different persons in different roles in the same or different subgroups can take cultural leadership roles at the same time or at different times. A comprehensive consideration of cultural leadership must therefore provide for multiple cultural leaders.”

One strand of work acknowledging the potential role of other actors is the negotiated order perspective (Strauss, 1978; Strauss, Schatzman, Ehrlich, Bucher, & Sabshin, 1963), which “emphasizes the fluid, continuously emerging qualities of the organization, the changing web of interactions woven among its members, and it suggests that order is something at which the members of the organization must constantly work” (Day & Day, 1977: 132). The negotiated order perspective draws researchers’ attention to the “dynamics of interaction and culture creation” (Brannen & Salk, 2000: 455) and highlights the notion that culture change can take various forms among groups in an organization due to differences in localized interactions among colleagues (Fine, 2012). Hallett (2003) adopts this perspective in his conceptualization of organizational culture as an order that is constantly in a state of (re)negotiation through individuals’ daily practices and interactions in the workplace.

Other research has begun to theorize and study empirically how such individuals could shape their organizations’ cultures. In recent work, individuals outside of senior
leadership positions have been found to play crucial roles in culture change initiatives (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007), particularly as sources of more localized changes in culture (Alvesson, 2013; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011) and in temporary organizations (Parent & Maclntosh, 2013). Howard-Grenville et al. (2011) found that individuals outside of senior leadership roles could create and utilize liminality to introduce and allow individuals to experience new cultural resources. Alvesson (2013) suggests that a broad range of individuals could reframe situations when interacting with their colleagues, resulting in more localized changes in shared meanings.

Recently, Sonenshein (2016: 350) developed the concept of meaning-making, which he defines as “the construction and advancement of an interpretation of an issue.” Sonenshein (2016) argues that meaning-making can be a powerful way for change agents without formal power to shape meanings and draw attention to social issues, which vary in their legitimacy and equivocality. Sonenshein (2016) theorizes four potential forms of meaning-making tactics: framing, labeling, importing, and maintaining. For example, for an issue that has low illegitimacy and high equivocality, a change agent could use labeling, which involves “using a label to concisely convey a compelling interpretation of the issue” (Sonenshein, 2016: 357).

In terms of work specifically focused on sustainability-oriented culture change, there is a recognition that such change can occur from the “middle up”, yet empirical work is limited (Howard-Grenville et al., 2014: 268). Van der Heijden, Cramer, and Driessen’s (2012) findings suggest that change agents can facilitate changes in meanings through their sensemaking and by adapting sustainability initiatives to fit the
local context. These findings suggest that internal change agents may be able to change meanings within their organization through various forms of work.

Collectively, scholars have pointed to the fact that we know little about how individuals outside of senior leadership position can shape culture (Alvesson, 2013; Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011) and point to the need to better understand the role of a wider range of actors in culture change initiatives (Meek, 1988; Trice & Beyer, 1991). Beyond the abovementioned work, much still remains to be understood about the cultural change work of individuals outside of senior leadership positions and the mechanisms through which their work can engender cultural change. Sonenshein’s (2016) work provides many promising insights, yet his work is theoretical and yet to be empirically tested. In addition, while Alvesson (2013) suggests that change agents could engage in everyday reframing and provides examples of the practice, the practice has yet to be thoroughly investigated. There may be additional, more varied, forms of work that internal change agents could undertake beyond what has been proposed to date, and different mechanisms through which this work might engender cultural change. Different forms of work might also have effects on different meanings and actions, and identifying these more nuanced effects could shed light on why cultural change is rarely a dichotomous, either/or process—a reality emphasized by various authors (e.g. Harris & Metallinos, 2002; Harris & Ogbonna, 1998, 2002).

**Improving change agents’ capacity for cultural change work.** While internal change agents don’t have the same advantage of formal authority as do senior leaders (Balogun et al., 2005), there may be ways for them to overcome this disadvantage. One prominent suggestion in this vein is gaining legitimacy, which is seen as an important
potential source of power to influence culture, particularly in the absence of formal authority (Hallett, 2007). Legitimacy, which refers to “a generalized perception or assumption that the actions of an entity are desirable, proper, or appropriate” (Suchman, 1995: 574), forms the basis of an individual’s symbolic power, which refers to individuals’ power to shape meanings and define situations (Bourdieu, 1991; Hallett, 2003). As others find a person’s practices desirable, proper, or appropriate, they imbue them with legitimacy, which can subsequently be deployed as symbolic power to shape the organization’s culture through their interactions with coworkers (Hallett, 2003). For instance, an individual with skills in water-cooler conversations can be imbued with legitimacy by her or his colleagues if those skills are seen as valuable (Hallett, 2003). As such, change agents’ efforts to gain legitimacy may help them overcome their lack of formal authority. Research on how change agents might gain legitimacy to enable them to drive cultural change and overcome their lack of formal authority is limited and tends to focus on changes in deep-seated personal characteristics, such as individuals’ dispositions (Hallett, 2003) and the cultural capital they develop throughout their lifetime (Hallett, 2007). I am aware of limited work that has investigated specific tactics through which individuals can gain legitimacy. In a recent study addressing this gap, Daudigeos (2013) studied how staff professionals without formal authority can gain legitimacy, finding that they can increase their level of perceived legitimacy through various forms of internal and external networking. For instance, participants in Daudigeos’ (2013: 735) study reported that external networking helps them gain legitimacy by providing them with “an implicit association with the authority of such external parties”. While these findings take important steps towards increasing our knowledge of how change agents can gain legitimacy, there may be additional ways of gaining legitimacy that have not
yet been identified. Furthermore, while scholars have found that legitimacy can support individuals’ cultural change work through granting them access to more symbolic power, there may be additional mechanisms through which legitimacy can support cultural change work. Unpacking these mechanisms and interrelationships could help shed light on novel and important microprocesses that facilitate change agents’ cultural change work.

2.4 Summary: Towards a Deeper Understanding of Cultural Change Work

In this chapter, I reviewed work on organizational culture, with a particular emphasis on debates over what constitutes culture, the dynamics of culture and action, and the possibility of cultural change. My goal was to situate my conceptualization of culture within this body of work. Specifically, in my dissertation I conceptualize organizational culture as the shared meanings held by members of a group. My definition of culture is primarily ideational, in that I do not include material elements and actions within my definition of culture but argue that that it is beneficial, and often necessary, to study the linkage between the two. In terms of the debate over the dynamics of culture, I adopt the perspective that individuals are capable of selectively deploying meanings to address various situations, and that there is a reciprocal, mutually-constitutive link between meanings and actions. At the same time, I acknowledge the potential constraining role of culture. Finally, I adopt the perspective that cultural change is possible, yet may be difficult, particularly in the absence of major transformational events and when undertaken by individuals outside of senior leadership positions.
Based on my analysis of prior work, I argue that our knowledge of the microprocesses of cultural change is limited, particularly with regards to the cultural change work of individuals outside of senior management positions. In order to contribute to his body of work, I aim to further unpack the varied cultural change work of internal change agents, the outcomes of this work on employees’ shared meanings and actions, and the social mechanisms (Hedstrom & Swedberg, 1998) through which cultural change work shapes meanings and actions. These insights could increase researchers’ and practitioners’ collective repertoire of diverse forms of cultural change work and the ways in which they engender cultural change. They could also help answer calls to pay closer attention the process of sustainability-oriented culture and cultural change in organizations (Howard-Grenville & Bertels, 2012; Russell & McIntosh, 2011).
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

“The road ahead for organizational culture will be worth our observation. I think that as you travel abroad this next year and gather impressions for when we meet again, you should keep an eye on organizational cultures. Look for them on the highways and byways of life in human organizations. Examine blind alleys. Watch for unexpected curves, for potholes, for washouts. Let us see whether we can discern, in time, the development of useful maps of the terrain.” -Raven (Frost et al., 1985: 23)

3.1 Research Strategy

I grounded my research in primarily subjectivist assumptions about ontology and epistemology (Burrell & Morgan, 1979), and thus adopted an interpretive, emergent, and inductive research strategy and an in-depth interpretive case study design. In-depth interpretive case studies focus on generating interpretive understandings by gaining a detailed understanding of individuals’ subjective meanings and understandings (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). These understandings enable scholars to develop novel insights about processes and concepts (Langley & Abdallah, 2011). More generally, when executed well, qualitative approaches have the virtue of unpacking and understanding individuals’ interpretations of their contexts and events and the processes through which phenomena unfold (Hammersley, 2008). My design also addresses calls for more qualitative (Lo, Peters, & Kok, 2012; Manika et al., 2015) and longitudinal (Norton, Parker, Zacher, & Ashkanasy, 2015; Ozblizir & Kelloway, 2015) work on the microfoundations of sustainability in the workplace.

3.2 Research Context

I undertook my research at ManufactureCo, which was an ideal research site as it was undertaking a major cultural change initiative that was largely being driven by a
team of Change Agents\(^3\) without formal authority over the individuals they were influencing. ManufactureCo rolled out Green Future, a major change initiative focused on integrating sustainability into its organizational culture and every employee’s day-to-day work. ManufactureCo considered both the environmental and social elements of sustainability, focusing on waste diversion, reducing water use, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions both in its operations and with its customers and suppliers, as well as ethical business conduct, reducing excessive overtime, increasing participation in community volunteering programs, and increasing employee engagement with sustainability and wellness. The overarching goals of Green Future were to inspire and challenge employees to re-examine their day-to-day work through the lens of sustainability (Green Future official report). One of the Change Agents described it this way: “Green Future is about getting [all of our employees] thinking about [sustainability] in their day-to-day job on an ongoing basis. The endpoint of this initiative is I want to be walking down the hall and hear somebody talk about a project that they’re working on and talk about the financial, social, and environmental implication[s].”\(^4\)

ManufactureCo is a North America-based global business-to-business technology manufacturing organization with customers spanning a wide range of industries. Its industry has been described by many employees as commoditized and highly cost competitive, with limited opportunities for differentiation or increasing

\(^3\) I capitalize the term change agents when referring to the change agents at ManufactureCo, and use lowercase when referring to change agents in a more abstracted way.

\(^4\) All quotes are verbatim from my notes and transcripts, with the exception of minor edits made for grammar and clarity or to protect anonymity.
markup. Yet at the same time, customers also have rigorous technical standards they impose on ManufactureCo and its competitors:

“Our customers expect a certain quality standard and that’s a very high-quality standard. They're not going to forgive us for any kind of a defect rate at all. That's just table stakes for us and our competitors. To try and argue that we have better quality than our six closest competitors? It's kind of a silly argument to make. We're really all very much the same” (Site Supply Chain Manager).

If these conditions didn’t make the industry challenging enough, customers also frequently made changes to their standards and product lines, expecting their suppliers to quickly readjust their products and processes: “The products and the things that you build are constantly changing. Who you are building it for is constantly changing. The market regulations that you’re building for are constantly changing” (Change Agent).

Yet, paradoxically, customers were also frequently risk averse, craving innovation yet wanting to make sure it was risk-proof: “[Our customers] are fast moving but they're incredibly risk averse. If you come up with an out-there idea they will rush to be the third person to adopt it. They don't want to be the first person. They want to make sure that all the problems have been vetted” (Change Agent). All of these factors shaped the central meanings in ManufactureCo’s culture, which I describe in greater detail in Section 4.1.

3.3 Data Sources

My selection of data sources was driven by my desire to gain a cross-validated, in-depth, and processual understanding of the form and effects of the cultural change work of the Change Agents rolling out Green Future. In reflecting on the state of research on organizational change, Buchanan and Dawson (2007: 674–675) note that “single voiced narratives of change offer little to broaden our knowledge of
organizational change processes, and yet this remains the dominant form of knowledge acquisition in this field." Interpretations of cultural change initiatives can vary widely across individuals and groups in organizations (e.g. Harris & Metallinos, 2002; Morgan & Ogbonna, 2008). In order to gain an in-depth understanding of cultural change work, it is crucial to study not only the work and perspectives of change agents and senior leaders but also the interpretations and associated actions of change recipients (Murdoch & Geys, 2014; Thomas et al., 2010). Studying the interpretations of multiple individuals can provide researchers with a nuanced understanding of how meanings get negotiated in interactions among organizational actors (Thomas et al., 2010). Furthermore, it is important to gather “longitudinal, rich, and varied” data in order to gain a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of organizational processes (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & van de Ven, 2013: 6). Gathering longitudinal and rich data can enable researchers to draw more substantial and meaningful conclusions about the culture change initiative under study (Alvesson, 2013). In highlighting the importance of longitudinal research on culture change, Martin (2002: 346–347) notes that “longitudinal studies of culture change are very rare [...] cultural research on change has frequently offered oversimplified generalizations about cultural inertia or the ease of value engineering [...] our understanding of cultural change—particularly change that is not top-down, anticipated, or controlled by management is spotty at best.”

In my dissertation, I draw from a broad corpus of data (see Table 1 for a summary of data used in this dissertation) that spans 2013-2017 and includes interview data, observational data, and secondary data. My dissertation was conceived based on a total of 6 interviews of preliminary data from another research project gathered by
another researcher throughout 2013. I then gained support and formal access from ManufactureCo to study the rollout of Green Future at the Headquarters and three international sites (AsiaManufacturing1, AsiaManufacturing2, and AmericasManufacturing) under the agreement that I share high-level, aggregate findings and reflections with the Change Agents on an annual basis.

--- Insert Table 1 about here ---

Interview data. In addition to drawing on the 6 abovementioned interviews, from 2014 to 2017 I undertook a total of 222 interviews with 128 participants. 43 of these interviews were with the Change Agents. These interviews touched on topics including the history of ManufactureCo and Green Future, the various forms of cultural change work they undertook, the perceived effects of that work, and their perceptions of factors that can facilitate or hinder sustainability-oriented cultural change. In addition, I undertook 179 interviews with a broad cross-section of ManufactureCo employees, most of whom were based at the Headquarters and three of the company’s international sites. Within these various work groups at the different sites, my initial focus was on interviewing multiple employees along with the direct leader of each work group. The primary focus of these interviews was on exploring their interpretations of sustainability and Green Future, the ways in which they are incorporating sustainability into their work, their perceptions of the Change Agents’ cultural change work, and their perceptions of factors that can facilitate or hinder sustainability-oriented cultural change. As with interviews with the Change Agents, while an initial interview guide was developed for the study, some of the specific questions asked evolved throughout the study period in order to follow up on new analyses and theoretical connections. As I
analyzed my data throughout the study period, I engaged in “theoretical sampling” (Suddaby, 2006: 634), whereby I adjusted the focus of my data collection based on my emergent findings. For instance, upon beginning to identify various forms of the Change Agents’ indirect cultural change work – which I later defined as effortful actions undertaken by individuals to develop and improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work more effectively – I refocused parts of my interviews to focus on unpacking and delineating the varied forms of this work. Similarly, in later stages of my analysis, during which I undertook “theoretical coding” (Glaser, 1978: 72) (described in the next section), I refocused parts of my interviews to attempt to fill data gaps regarding linkages among my second-order themes.

I strove to speak with participants multiple times throughout the study period in order to be able to investigate the relationships among cultural change work, changes in meanings, and changes in workplace sustainability actions over time. Of the 128 participants, 44 were interviewed more than once; several participants were either unavailable for additional interviews or had left the company during the study period. The vast majority of interviews were undertaken in person, with the remainder undertaken over the phone when I was not at the same site as the participant at the time of the interview. Finally, 115 of the 222 interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim, with the remainder transcribed from notes taken during the interviews, which were often verbatim as I usually used a computer. While I strove to record as many interviews as possible, many participants, primarily those at the international sites, expressed a preference for not being recorded.
In addition to the abovementioned interviews, I engaged in several more informal meetings and interactions with the Change Agents to discuss various aspects of the change initiative and my analysis, which I included in 10 contact summaries.

*Observational data.* Throughout the study period, I also undertook a range of observations while on site and attending meetings. Observations are an important source of data to gain an in-depth understanding of organizational life and to unearth grounded mechanisms: “The first step is to get grounded because without attention to practice and meaning, we may remain mired in abstract images of organizations” (Bechky, 2011: 1162). In total, I was at four of the company’s sites for a total of 133 days: During the summer of 2014 I visited Headquarters, AsiaManufacturing1, and AmericasManufacturing; during the winter of 2014 I visited Headquarters; during the summer of 2015 I visited Headquarters and AsiaManufacturing1; during the summer of 2016 I visited Headquarters, AsiaManufacturing2, and AmericasManufacturing; and during the winter of 2017 I visited the Headquarters for one day. I focused my observations on the structured and unstructured interactions of the Change Agents as they planned and undertook their work, such as an interaction in which a Change Agent approached an employee to discuss and present a new pallet she identified; on experiencing and understanding the organization’s internal processes, such as eating in the canteen and observing employees’ waste disposal practices; and on noting details about the physical context, such as observing the layout and specific sustainability-related infrastructures at various sites. I documented these observations in detailed field notes, which were typically typed within 24 hours. When off site, I also virtually observed several meetings organized by the Change Agents, during which I took notes. In total,
these observations generated approximately 190,000 words (approximately 400 pages) of additional text.

_Several data_. Finally, throughout the study period I gathered 103 internal and external documents. Examples of these documents include ManufactureCo’s annual sustainability report, presentations about the change initiative, and newsletters. While not as central to my analysis as my primary data, these documents supported me in constructing timelines (Bertels et al., 2016) and in contextualizing my primary data (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

I adopted an inductive approach to data analysis, in which I identified patterns and developed theory by working from individual fragments of the data (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001). Such an approach is suggested when analyzing process data (Van de Ven, 2007). While I consulted the existing literature on organizational culture and sustainability, I did so later in the analysis process, treating it as a source of “outside comparisons” (Glaser, 1978: 51) to avoid confirmation bias (Gioia, Corley, & Hamilton, 2013). I began my data analysis shortly after beginning data collection, which, as described in the previous section, allowed me to identify new directions and gaps in my data that I could investigate during subsequent interviews and observations. This ultimately allowed me to achieve higher levels of category saturation (Suddaby, 2006) by identifying the relevant dimensions and properties of each category (Holton, 2010). For instance, through gathering additional data, I was able to specify that the first-order category _preparatory work_ had the unique properties of being
individual, cognitive, and focused on constructing cultural change interactions, which differed from other forms of indirect cultural change work. I used qualitative data analysis software to support my coding process. I began my data analysis process with open coding (Holton, 2010), during which I coded short segments of data for what I perceived was happening or was being expressed by the interviewee (Locke, 2001). Based on my research question, I had a particular interest in, and focus on, coding for the work undertaken by the internal change agents, employees’ perceptions of the work, cultural changes at ManufactureCo, any sustainability-related actions undertaken by individuals, and employees’ perceptions of facilitators and inhibitors of Green Future. For instance, I coded the following quote as flagging pallet utilization:

“In terms of [Global Transport], it can be optimizing transportation solutions. In [our department], for example, we flag pallet utilization. That means the area on top of the pallet. Or if it is 120 by 102, you can have boxes of different types that may not take up all the space, which is waste. So, for me, anything below 70 or 80 percent is not good enough and we would see whether we can re-arrange the boxes to improve the area utilization” (Global Transport Analyst).

Through the process of comparing data segments to other data segments and to previous codes (Locke, 2001), I collapsed my open codes into first-order categories (Nag, Corley, & Gioia, 2007). As an example, recognizing that the codes optimizing transport systems, flagging pallet utilization, incorporating distributed weight analysis, and reducing packaging use all touched on efforts to measure and reduce the environmental effects of employees’ work processes, I collapsed them into the first-order category quantifying and reducing the impact of core work processes. As I analyzed additional data from my ongoing data collection, I continuously assessed whether new data segments fit within existing first-order categories and how they shaped those categories (Locke, 2001).
Following this first phase of coding, I undertook second-order coding, during which I compared my first-order categories to each other and to constructs in prior research in order to explore connections among my themes and prior research (Glaser, 1978). Throughout this process I often returned back to the original data to compare individual data fragments with each other among closely connected categories to create categories that better captured the meaning of the data and to group them into second-order themes (Gioia et al., 2013; van Maanen, 1979). For example, recognizing that the three first-order categories *building underlying knowledge, planning work, and reflective work* were all related to individual cognitive work aimed at constructing other cultural change interactions, I collapsed these into the second-order theme *preparatory work*. As I engaged with the existing literature, I reflected on the connections between my analysis and existing constructs, finding some close similarities. For instance, during my analysis I identified two second-order themes related to work undertaken by change agents to shape the meanings employees associated with sustainability. Upon reading Sonenshein’s (2016) work on meaning-making, I found that that his definition of this concept was closely linked to two of my second-order themes, leading me to adopt his construct of meaning-making work in naming these two themes as *tailored meaning-making work* and *broad meaning-making work*. This phase of the coding process was highly iterative, and I frequently went back and forth between my first-order categories, my data, extant literature, and my specific research question in developing my second-order categories. For example, as I engaged the research on cultural change, I re-analyzed portions of my data through this lens to focus more explicitly on the integration of meanings throughout the organization.
In this phase of analysis, I identified eleven second-order themes related to my research question that I describe further in Section 4.2: two outcomes of cultural change related to a focal meaning (cultural elevation and cultural integration), two outcomes of actions related to the focal meaning (peripheral actions and integrated actions), four forms of direct cultural change work (broad meaning-making work, tailored meaning-making work, broad support work, and tailored support work), and three forms of indirect cultural change work (change agent legitimacy-gaining work, relational work, and preparatory work). Table 2 contains a sample data structure, in which I define all 11 second-order themes, list their component first-order categories, and provide sample data representing my coding progression.

--- Insert Table 2 about here ---

Finally, throughout the study period but particularly towards the end as I finalized my focus, I engaged in “theoretical coding” (Glaser, 1978: 72) in order to investigate the connections among the second-order themes most relevant to the focus of my dissertation (given the breadth of data I collected, I identified additional themes related to topics such as the work of senior leaders, the home-work linkage in cultural change initiatives, and international aspects of cultural change initiatives that I do not discuss in this dissertation). This theoretical coding was crucial to developing inductively-derived theory about cultural change work and how this work engenders cultural change and changes in employees’ actions.\footnote{Note that other factors beyond the cultural change work of internal change agents are likely to influence the outcomes identified here, including factors that predate the study period. My theorizing focuses on the cultural change work of internal change agents.} Upon identifying these second-order themes, I
investigated the connections among them through additional analysis and deduction, ultimately developing two pathways of cultural change that are underpinned by different forms of direct cultural change work and supported by three forms of indirect cultural change work.

### 3.5 Strategies to Ensure Rigour

Scholars have suggested a range of approaches that researchers could utilize to increase methodological rigor in case studies. In a review of this literature, Gibbert and Ruigrok (2010) suggest several strategies, many of which I applied in my dissertation.

To increase construct validity, my selection of data sources enabled me to triangulate data across multiple sources (interviews, observations, and documents) and a wide range of participants’ perspectives, and I described my data collection circumstances in detail. To increase internal validity, I developed a theoretical framework to demonstrate how my emergent theory works in depth and compared it with extant literature, connections which I discuss in the Discussion. To increase external validity, I provided a clear, theoretical rationale for my case study selection (that this case represents a cultural change initiative undertaken by change agents without formal authority) and provided details on the context, which include my earlier description of ManufactureCo’s operating environment and a detailed description of ManufactureCo’s organizational culture that I develop in the next chapter. To increase reliability, I documented my research procedures in detail and maintained an organized database of all my data.

Finally, following other qualitative scholars (e.g. Nag et al., 2007), I undertook several member checks with ManufactureCo employees and Change Agents. Member checking can be a powerful tool to increase the trustworthiness of results as participants are
given the opportunity to provide feedback on researchers’ interpretations and representations (Locke & Velamuri, 2009). Member checking also gives researchers an opportunity to structure and articulate their thoughts on their findings (Saldaña, 2009). Throughout my dissertation, I used two primary approaches to member check. First, throughout the study period the Change Agents received high-level, anonymized summaries of the main findings and analysis to date, which served as an excellent opportunity for them to comment on my interpretations and findings. Second, towards the end of my field work, I summarized my main interpretations and discussed them with various participants at the end of their interviews. Both forms of member checking helped increase my confidence that my interpretations and findings were in line with the experiences of my study participants.

3.6 Reflexivity

Given my research design – specifically, the fact that I was engaged in this project for an extended period of time, had multiple interactions with several participants, and engaged in member checking – there is the possibility that my actions may have influenced participants’ actions and perceptions. Reflexivity, understood as “the project of examining how the researcher and intersubjective elements impinge on, and even transform, research” (Finlay, 2002: 210), can be an effective means of ensuring rigor in cases where researchers expect to have an influence on the research context (Jay, 2013). In analyzing my data and reflecting on the research process, I identified two primary ways in which I may have shaped the actions and perceptions of employees at ManufactureCo. First, I may have influenced the cultural change work undertaken by the Change Agents by providing them feedback on the rollout of Green
Future and by the nature of my interview questions. Since the focus of my research is on the effects of this work and the mechanisms through which it may engender cultural change and changes in employees’ actions, I do not feel that my impact here affected my theorizing. Second, I may have influenced how employees interpreted sustainability and their workplace sustainability-related actions by bringing attention to Green Future and by focusing employees’ attention on their interpretations and actions. Recognizing this potential impact made me pay particular attention to unpacking the specific mechanisms through which any changes in the integration of meanings and changes in actions may have occurred.
CHAPTER 4: CULTURAL CHANGE WORK AT MANUFACTURECO

“As I often say, what I’m trying to do here is work myself out of the job in that they don’t need someone in five years or six years or seven years who’s driving sustainability because we will be sustainable. It will be part of our culture” (Change Agent).

In this section, I provide an overview of ManufactureCo’s organizational culture and develop my analysis of the cultural change work undertaken by the Change Agents. I begin this section with an overview of ManufactureCo’s culture, followed by developing a brief narrative about how Green Future was conceptualized and rolled out. I continue by presenting two inductively-derived pathways that outline how various forms of cultural change work can engender cultural change around a focal meaning and related changes in employees’ actions. I then explore the interplay between change agents’ indirect cultural change work – effortful actions undertaken by individuals to develop and improve their capacity to undertake direct cultural change work more effectively – and the direct cultural change work underpinning both pathways of cultural change.

4.1 ManufactureCo’s Organizational Culture

The central meanings that permeate ManufactureCo stemmed from its history of competing in a low-margin, hyper-competitive, technologically-advanced, continuously-evolving, yet risk-averse industry. I identified eight, often interrelated, central meanings that I felt characterize ManufactureCo’s culture and that shaped employees’ choices of actions and the way they approached their daily work. To avoid confusing these meanings with similar concepts, I use single quotation marks when referring to these meanings in reporting my findings.

‘Thrifty’. Upon arriving at ManufactureCo’s Headquarters on my first day of fieldwork, it become evident that ManufactureCo placed a premium on being ‘thrifty’,
striving to reduce costs and save money wherever possible. Furnishings were generally sparse in areas not usually seen by customers, with furniture in many offices and cubicles having an aged and minimalist flavour. Meeting rooms generally consisted of a small table, surrounded by a variety of chairs, and often an old PC monitor that employees used as a display during meetings. Meetings would rarely be accompanied by food or coffee; instead, employees often purchased food from the canteen. During my fieldwork, in response to layoffs, large parts of the Headquarters site were cordoned off as “white space” without electricity or air conditioning to earn credits from a regional government. Enshrining ‘thrifty’ throughout the organization, the company had a wide range of processes and rules regarding expenditures in order to cut costs and ensure that all costs were absolutely necessary. One example was a process for ordering office supplies aimed at reducing costs due to loss, unnecessary orders, or potential theft.

During lunch one day one of the Change Agents reflected:

“Now it’s easier to bring in your own pens and supplies than use the company ones. Now you have to order everything from a catalogue from our supplier using your account number and get approval from your manager. [...] It gets ridiculous… [My manager] borrowed my pen once to sign something I think and then took it away… I had to go back and ask him for my pen because I only have a couple” (field notes).

In addition to being encouraged to avoid spending money unnecessarily, employees across functions often had challenging targets around cost cutting in order for the company to remain competitive. A Site Operations Director reflected that “right now we try our best to eliminate waste to try to become more competitive on cost. That is the reason why we compare year over year we reduced [direct labour] by [a large percentage] over time.”
‘Procedural and detail orientation’. Processes and protocols extended beyond concerns with thrift. ManufactureCo was characterized by a strong ‘procedural and detail orientation’, according to which employees operated based on comprehensive and, at times, rigid policies and rules and expected detailed information prior to making decisions. Employees variously described ManufactureCo as having “strong process controls”, “red tape everywhere”, and being highly “bureaucratic”. Detailed processes covered everything from manufacturing processes, technical requirements, financial control, requirements for advancement, minor injury reporting, how costs and expenses should be logged and categorized, and even, at one site, how to properly use and clean toilets. The spread of procedures throughout the organization is epitomized by this story from a Site Facilities Manager trying to sell waste cardboard that I observed:

“So here I am making the company money for garbage that nobody wants. The old system worked just fine… the local finance guy just raises the [credit] limit manually every month because we’re making the company money… that way we keep getting paid regularly for the cardboard we ship out, which used to be just garbage. Now these corporate finance guys tell me I have to run this just like if I was selling something…I have to call the guy every time… ‘Can you raise the limit? Can you raise the limit? Can you raise the limit?’ [...] It’s like we are making it harder for people to pay us… when I was paying somebody to just take our garbage, it was so much easier to pay them” (field notes).

Many processes, particularly those related to manufacturing, were audited on a regular basis by customers and internal audit teams. While adherence to processes was generally very high throughout the organization, employees at times omitted some steps or found workarounds. For instance, despite frequent warnings about safe movement in the office area, many employees didn’t hold the handrail when walking up stairs and used their phone while walking in the hallways. Attention to procedures was mirrored by a preoccupation with data and details, with ManufactureCo employees expecting and
drawing on detailed data and information when making decisions. To get a plan approved, it was essential “to have your Is dotted and your Ts crossed” (Change Agent), with importance being placed on individuals who are “big picture smart, and able to also go down into the details” (Contracting Manager). One of the Change Agents’ comments captured the importance of this detail orientation well:

“Cash is extremely controlled. Every time there’s an expenditure you need to double, triple check. Anytime you bring in a new piece of equipment you need to double, triple check because that goes back to this line down type of situation. Any time you need to bring on a new supplier, you need to double, triple check because we are only as good as our ability to build quality product and to deliver quality product.”

‘Customer orientation’. Given the industry in which ManufactureCo operated and the fact that it was a B2B company, employees had a strong ‘customer orientation’. Employees not only wanted to meet their customers’ requirements, but also be seen as meeting them and be acknowledged for it. A Global Materials Analyst reflected that “we have a big thing here of wanting to appear successful on our customer scoreboard. So just ‘cuz we think we are fulfilling our requirements it’s fine, but we want our customer to acknowledge that.” Succeeding at pleasing a customer or winning new business was a highly-desired trait at ManufactureCo, something that could help put one on the fast track at the company: “[People who succeed at the company] just show a consistent performance record, land the big deal, deal with the big customer. That's kind of what would put you on that trajectory to be fast moving” (Change Agent). Customer successes were regularly recognized by senior leaders at company- or site-wide presentations. In contrast, not meeting customer needs or harming a customer relationship could quickly take one off the fast track. One Change Agent reflected that “it would be somebody creating a line down situation on a major customer, like making us
miss an on-time delivery or something like that. That has huge implications. I say that almost more so than I would say like somebody buying the wrong amount or maybe spending too much money." ManufactureCo’s ‘customer orientation’ extended to the layout of its sites, with the internal décor of areas that customers had access to deviating significantly from the minimalist and thrifty nature of employees' offices described above. I captured the following in one of my field notes:

“As I was entering the customer lobby this morning, I used the washroom in the main lobby. I noticed that it was much cleaner than the washrooms in the office area and had other notable differences as well. When I ran the tap to wash my hands, I noticed that it had a tap that had a continuous flow of water, which is very different from the taps upstairs at which you have to constantly touch the metal piece in order to get any water flowing on your hands. As I walked out, I noticed that this main lobby was generally very attractive, with a fresh coat of paint, an attractive desk, and meeting rooms with nice furniture. There were couches laid out in the middle with magazines displayed on them, and posters of the company’s products” (field notes).

It is important to note that ManufactureCo employees’ ‘customer orientation’ referred not only to external customers, but also the internal recipients of one’s work, which could be termed internal customers. One Site Human Resources Manager’s comments captured this orientation well: “It’s just my personal concern that when somebody asks for information, I have to respond and get it to them. Because I work for the customer, I always want to make sure I respond quickly, right?”

‘Innovation in a box’. When visiting a ManufactureCo site, an observer would also be hard-pressed to avoid noticing the organization’s commitment to lean principles and practices. Perhaps the most salient and influential element of this commitment was the meaning ‘innovation in a box’. The first part of this phrase refers to ManufactureCo’s relentless commitment to continuous improvement. One of the Change Agents put it this
way: “Everybody understands that their job can’t be wasteful. If you’re sitting around, if you’re not doing something, at some point in time, you’re not going to be there. You need to be adding value at all times. If you’re not adding value, you’re not being productive. That’s a cultural imperative at our company.” ManufactureCo committed extensive resources to encouraging and supporting employees in ideating and implementing improvements within their role, including creating a team of lean consultants that worked across sites and a wide variety of tools and processes. Continuously improving was seen as a crucial means of achieving goals including meeting customer needs, cutting costs, and improving employee morale. A Global Human Resources Analyst reflected: “I think it’s relevant to us because, in general, a lot of our pressures are to make our customer happier in cutting down the time we take to do something. In making things cost less or take up less material. It’s just part of our values, just being more efficient in every way.” The second part of the phrase captures the fact that, despite the cultural imperative that everyone must continuously improve, employees’ actual opportunities to make improvements were quite constrained. One of the Change Agents explained it this way: “There’s not a lot of room for creativity, but we still seem to be very creative. The box and the boundaries are very, very well defined as to what we’re allowed to work in, but in that box we’re very, very good at reorganizing that box to make it the most efficient.” When asked about the boundaries of the box, this Change Agent responded:

“The box for us is what your customer lets you do; it’s what the factory lets you do; it’s what the employees are willing to do. We’re very constrained with our scope. I may have an amazing idea to reduce energy, but if it affects quality, nobody is going to let me do it. I have to come up with ideas that are going to improve but not take away cost, not increase cost, not reduce quality and not increase lead time. I’m extremely constrained that my idea has to fit within the
four walls of the factory, not distract and not take away from that cost quality or lead time.”

While the vast majority of ManufactureCo employees received some formal training or introduction to lean principles, it was generally acknowledged that certain pockets of the organization drew on ‘innovation in a box’ more frequently, primarily those employees involved in operations and manufacturing roles. Nonetheless, during the period of my fieldwork, ManufactureCo was in the process of strengthening this meaning throughout the organization.

‘Goal orientation’. Another powerful part of the lean mentality that permeated the organization was ‘goal orientation’. Employees’ actions were heavily influenced by the goals, targets, objectives, and metrics they had in place for them and their department. An employee’s metrics would often be connected to their personal evaluation. As in many other organizations that practice lean principles, goals are often set at the top of the organization, with each subsequent layer focusing on more specific goals related to their area of expertise that operationalize the higher-level goals. Close attention to goals was seen as a way of ensuring that the organization can meet its commitments and strategies and control for any deviations. Because deviations from targets could be seen as a “cardinal sin”, employees were prepared to go to great lengths and work extraordinarily hard to meet their objectives. Some employees could face long lists of metrics that got followed up on regularly: “I mean that’s the core of the business. Monthly metrics, all that. The site GM pulls those up every month and quarter. We have to account every month for whether we hit our metrics. Like pages of them” (Site Supply Chain Analyst). Goals were often interpreted as a signal of what leaders wanted: “That’s really the top level of the organization signalling what matters to us […] I
don’t think we’re a top down culture but we’re a KPI culture. So, if you’re not talking about a metric, then lots of people wouldn’t see it as something important. So, the signalling shows that it’s important” (Change Agent). This signalling served as a way of separating out tasks that were mandatory and must be pursued from those that are “nice to have”. A Global Materials Manager reflected: “If you set the target, people see it as something we review monthly and check in on, or somebody is giving a status update and taking actions on what is outstanding. But if it’s not a target it’s just talk I guess. It’s something we say we should do but then we don’t get to.”

‘Failure aversion’. While ManufactureCo employees had a strong commitment to lean principles, ‘failure aversion’ was also a central meaning throughout the organization. That is, employees tried to avoid the perception that they made any errors or mistakes as part of their work, particularly when those errors could have impacted key foci such as cost, quality, and customer satisfaction. A Global Human Resources Analyst argued that a major reason for this aversion to failure was employees’ fear of potential negative consequences:

“\textquote{The current message from the CEO is to create new things and be the innovator. But people are scared of their own shadow because they are afraid of getting fired. We are scared to go off the cuff and do something exciting. Are we allowed to fail? In this kind of environment, not really. And that’s the issue.}”

Other employees echoed this sentiment, suggesting that being associated with an unsuccessful project could result in career consequences: “You can’t afford to fail here. At the end of the day it’s your proposal with your name on it” (Business Development Manager). Stories circulating the organization appeared to back this up: “There have been site GMs who have had wacky ideas that they implemented and that haven’t gone well and they’ve been at the door pretty quickly” (Contracting Manager). ‘Failure
aversion’ often manifested itself in employees being careful when implementing new initiatives and making sure that they have anticipated and de-risked as many problems as possible: “There is a perception that all the power in the company is within Finance and any idea has to be a home run. So, every time somebody steps up to the plate, they have to have everything solved and de-risked… it has to be a home run before Finance will consider it” (Change Agent).

While ‘failure aversion’ was common throughout the organization, my analysis suggests that it was generally more prevalent at some of ManufactureCo’s international sites. There was a common perception among Headquarters employees that there was a deep-seated “fear of a mole [and/or] auditor” (Global Human Resources Analyst), which resulted in intense preparations to avoid any perceived errors or failures: “If you use the term audit with some of the sites, they panic and they go into this mode where everything has to be clean and organized and set and there’s a very specific order to how things have to happen because failing is very bad in the culture” (Change Agent). This increased ‘failure aversion’ could result in employees at these sites being less open to sharing information across sites to prevent them from losing business.

‘Drinking from the firehose’. The combined effects of the abovementioned meanings inevitably put a lot of pressure on employees and on the business, and employees throughout the organization frequently described feeling like they are ‘drinking from the firehose’; that is, constantly facing high workloads and work-related pressures. ManufactureCo had been through several rounds of layoffs at various sites and was careful in refilling those lost positions: “So all the people that we’ve lost in that period, and didn’t replace, we’re finding that we are short on people, we’ve got some
skill gaps, and people are very strapped for time right now” (Site Supply Chain Manager). In removing positions, the company often moved tasks to other employees without giving them additional time. A Global Transport Analyst put it this way: “You can ask people here… they would all say they are doing 2 or 3 persons’ work. And that’s just how it goes with the business and the tough environment.” Even employees nominated for fast track career progression programs often didn’t get additional time to complete requisite activities, and reported finding balancing the conflicting tasks a near-impossible task. It isn’t a surprise, then, that “putting in an exorbitant amount of time [and] dedicating your life [to ManufactureCo] is seen as a prerequisite to being successful” (Global Materials Analyst).

‘Sustainability’. Yet despite the immense pressures experienced by employees throughout ManufactureCo, an important meaning shared throughout the organization was ‘sustainability’. Employees broadly experienced ManufactureCo as an organization that prioritizes social and environmental sustainability, compliance, and ethical concerns and commits resources to them. A Site Human Resources Director captured this sentiment this way: “No matter the company admit or not, I think ManufactureCo is internally proud of itself and its legacy […] this makes us different from other [companies in the industry] that are so much cost sensitive.” ManufactureCo was often ahead of the curve in its industry in pioneering new rules and practices around ethics and environmental stewardship that it worked to diffuse throughout the industry. A Compliance Manager echoed this sentiment, arguing that this commitment was deep seated and permeated the organization: “ManufactureCo has always done the things or the elements that pick up CSR. It wasn’t formal, it wasn’t published, it wasn’t structured.
It was really how I guess ManufactureCo behaves. I think we have a high level of integrity at ManufactureCo. I think our brand and values are very important to us.” These commitments were often a source of pride for employees, giving them a sense of pleasure and satisfaction: “For me personally, it gives me a lot of pride and the feeling of making a difference” (Site Human Resources Manager). While ‘sustainability’ permeated the organization, it was largely disconnected from the other meanings, and only pockets of employees drew on it within their everyday work. The goal of Green Future was to integrate sustainability into the organizational culture and into the daily work of all employees.

4.2 The Conception and Rollout of Green Future

While ‘sustainability’ had been an important part of the organization’s culture prior to the rollout of Green Future, sustainability-related actions had primarily been incorporated into the work of various individuals based on specific customer requirements, regulations, cost-reduction efforts, and on ManufactureCo’s involvement in an industry-wide initiative to address social and environmental concerns. One of the Change Agents reflected: “Historically, I think ManufactureCo has always done a good job of priding itself on doing the right things and doing everything that we have to do by the book, by the letter of the law. We’re not going to be saying one thing and then dump chemicals in the back parking lot of the facilities.” On the environmental side, employees in some departments, such as Facilities, Operations, and EH&S, were focused on increasing recycling, and in some cases even commercializing waste, and reducing energy and water use through a variety of often ad-hoc and uncoordinated improvements. These actions were driven primarily by cost considerations and limited
efforts had been undertaken to calculate or communicate any ancillary environmental benefits. A group of employees had attempted to commercialize ManufactureCo’s sustainability efforts both internally across sites and externally to customers; however, both efforts fizzled out due to a lack of interest from potential customers:

“They could never prove that they had a service that customers were willing to pay for and, in fact, customers said ‘Yeah, we want to be green but we’re not going to pay you to make us green or help us become green.’ So they could never establish the business case. […] They were [also] trying to sell their services to other ManufactureCo sites saying, ‘Look at the success we’ve had from being green. We want to help you become green and we’ll cross charge our time to your site and we’ll come over and we’ll teach.’ Everyone was like, ‘No, I don’t have time for that’” (Change Agent).

On the social side, ManufactureCo had launched company-wide programs on ethics, appropriate business conduct, community giving, and employee volunteering, although participation in volunteering initiatives was limited and sporadic. These social and environmental sustainability initiatives were not integrated together and occurred largely in silos. In the years directly preceding the launch of Green Future, ManufactureCo also began publishing separate reports highlighting its social and environmental sustainability initiatives, later combining them into a single report. Initially, employees and customers applauded the organization’s sustainability performance, yet as time passed fewer improvements were registered and focus on sustainability seemingly plateaued. A senior leader that would later become the lead Change Agent recalled a dialogue he had with the writers of one of these reports:

“They came to me with their report and I looked at it and I said, ‘This is almost exactly the same as last year’s report.’ [They responded:] ‘Well we haven’t made much progress. We haven’t really done anything different.’ I said, ‘Okay fine, but we can’t just keep publishing these reports and say the same thing because it’s really not meaningful if we’re not trying to drive improvement year over year. It’s none of my business. It’s not my group, but I think you guys need to think about this.’”
Serendipitously, in 2012 ManufactureCo’s CEO had been invited to a sustainability conference. The CEO asked this senior leader to attend. The conference was an eye opener for him in terms of highlighting the potential benefits of pursuing sustainability and the potential costs of not taking action:

“The message was: we created this mess, now we have to fix it and fixing it doesn't necessarily mean it's expensive or costing us money or is bad for our business [...] They kept saying the same thing over and over again, [...] technology is the driver of innovation that's going to allow us to become more sustainable. I'm thinking, Jesus [...] if this is where the business world is going and where our customers are going, we really need to get in on this and understand what's going on and we need to be become more sustainable ourselves if we want to be a player in the technologies that are going to be driving the efficiencies that allow us to become more sustainable” (Change Agent).

Upon returning from the conference, he resolved to spread the word among the handful of employees who had been working on sustainability. Yet, he soon discovered that many of the efforts to date had fizzled:

“So I said, ‘okay, when I get back to the company, I have to go talk to whoever is in charge of environmental sustainability and fill them in on all this because I think this is really great insight.’ [...] I started calling around to all these different people saying, ‘What happened to [the commercialization efforts]? What happened to this big movement that had been going on for the last few years?’ They said, ‘It just died because customers didn't want to pay for it. We could never establish the business case and people just lost interest and it didn't have an owner. There was no strategy and it just kind of died’” (Change Agent).

He decided to approach the CEO, stressing the urgency of taking action on sustainability:

“We're on the verge of missing a huge opportunity. We need to have executive ownership of this. We need to have a strategy. We need to embed this into our corporate culture and make it part of our DNA and who we are. Then we don't need to charge customers because we're a sustainable enterprise and we just share our knowledge with our customers and our suppliers and our employees and we'll become more efficient economically and financially from the cost savings associated with becoming more sustainable and we'll probably win new business from customers because technology is the big driver here and it's important to all of our customers” (Change Agent).
The CEO was convinced about the potential, and asked this senior leader to put together a strategy with details about how sustainability could be better integrated into the culture and operations of ManufactureCo and what resources would be necessary. The senior leader spent several months putting a strategy and business case together. During this time period, he investigated what other companies were doing in terms of sustainability, investigated how sustainability relates to ManufactureCo’s customers, and developed a strategy with the help of a master’s student. He shared this preliminary strategy with other senior leaders throughout the organization to gain their input on it, which turned out to be a fortuitous opportunity to indirectly pitch it to them.

Upon completing his strategy and business case, he prepared to present it to the CEO. As the company was in a period of financial difficulties and layoffs, some of his colleagues warned him that asking for resources to put his strategy into action could be a difficult sell. Yet he persisted, feeling confident that this strategy could have wide-ranging benefits throughout the organization and beyond. Specifically, he argued that sustainability could increase employees’ morale and motivation, unlock new innovations, drive new revenue generation and cost cutting opportunities, differentiate the company from its competitors, and drive synergies across the company’s fragmented sustainability activities by making ‘sustainability’ a more focal and integrated part of the organization’s culture and every employee’s day-to-day work rather than an initiative deployed by select specialist roles. The CEO enthusiastically approved the plan, advising him that the focus of Green Future must not become a separate, standalone focus within the company: “[The CEO] said, ‘it’s not a sustainability strategy.”
It’s not a sustainability function. It’s how sustainability supports our other strategies’” (Change Agent).

The senior leader (now the lead Change Agent) then focused on hiring a team of four internal Change Agents for which the CEO had approved funding. An important consideration from the CEO was that these other Change Agents be hired internally. When recruiting the other Change Agents, the lead Change Agent was looking for individuals who had an interest in sustainability, had good project management skills, and knew the business and culture well. Each of the four initial Change Agents he hired had a long history within the organization. Broadly, the team of Change Agents was tasked with integrating sustainability into the culture and daily actions of all ManufactureCo employees. Within the abovementioned overarching goal of the cultural change initiative, each Change Agent had a specific focus area, which included leveraging sustainability as a means of increasing operational efficiencies and increasing customer value, improving employee working conditions, reducing harmful waste generation, and reducing electricity use. For instance, regarding waste, the focus was on changing meanings around waste generation: “Ideally, you’d want everyone to start thinking about, ‘Okay, this is a waste, what can I do to not have to throw this out, or not even have to recycle this in the first place?’” (Change Agent). Regarding leveraging sustainability, the focus included revisiting work through the lens of sustainability to reduce the environmental impact of work practices and processes: “We want them to look at revisiting their work to possibly deliver more value… like working with suppliers to change packaging so that less overall waste comes in” (Change Agent).
The Change Agents didn’t have formal authority over the employees they were attempting to influence. One Change Agent reflected: “There is none. We’re trying to influence without any authority. We’re trying to make the cases for change without directly having authority over anyone, and we never will.” Another Change Agent echoed this sentiment: “That’s the hardest part about the job. I don’t have any official authority over anybody. I just have to have the ability to influence people I don’t have authority over.” The Change Agents then finalized their preparation for launching Green Future. The initiative was formally launched in 2013, at which point the Change Agents began engaging in a wide range of work to meet the objectives of the change initiative.

By the start of my fieldwork in 2014, many employees throughout the organization were engaging in actions such as recycling and participating in some kinds of volunteer or community engagement activities. When they spoke about sustainability, they often discussed how sustainability was a priority for ManufactureCo and something that was a source of pride for them. However, in pockets of the organization, I noticed employees engaging in actions such as integrating sustainability into their customer sales pitches and optimizing transportation networks to reduce their carbon footprint. When these employees spoke about sustainability, they often discussed how they saw it as closely connected to their daily work and experiences at ManufactureCo.

I thus began identifying and analyzing the Change Agents’ work and examining how this work shifted how employees interpreted ‘sustainability’ and how it shifted their sustainability-related actions. By analyzing the combined work of the Change Agents, this led me to theorize two pathways of cultural change (cultural elevation and cultural integration) that are underpinned by different forms of direct cultural change work (broad
meaning-making and broad support work, and tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work, respectively). While this case focuses on ‘sustainability’ as the focal meaning, my descriptions below acknowledge that other change initiatives may be directed towards embedding other focal meanings. Important parts of the processes I describe relate to other meanings comprising an organization’s culture, which I refer to below simply as “other meanings” for brevity.⁶

4.3 The Cultural Elevation Pathway

As described in more detail below, in the cultural elevation pathway, the focal meaning is elevated with respect to other cultural meanings prevalent in the organization, equipping employees to engage in new actions related to the focal meaning but not to change their everyday work. When change agents engage in broad meaning-making work, they help elevate the focal meaning by augmenting specific interpretations of it. As the focal meaning becomes elevated, employees become equipped to engage in peripheral actions related to the focal meaning. Because employees may need support in deploying their newly-elevated resources, change agents engage in broad support work, which enables employees to successfully engage in peripheral actions. As employees successfully engage in peripheral actions, the elevation of the focal meaning becomes reinforced through a process of cultural

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⁶ Note that some of the work of the Change Agents described below in my findings was aided by (or in some cases driven by) other actors whom the Change Agents successfully recruited to support some of their direct cultural change work, including members of support teams such as Human Resources, Communications, and Facilities, as well as a small group of ‘Green Future Ambassadors’ the Change Agents identified to support their work. Despite this, much of the work was conceived and/or planned by the Change Agents, and therefore, I include it as a form of their cultural change work.
reinforcement. Figure 1 illustrates this pathway and captures the first-order codes underpinning each of the second-order categories.

--- Insert Figure 1 about here ---

**Change agents engage in broad meaning-making work.** Drawing on Sonenshein’s (2016) conceptualization of meaning-making, I define *broad meaning-making work* as efforts to advance interpretations of a focal meaning, targeted broadly throughout the organization, typically through indirect interactions. In their interactions with most employees throughout the organization, I observed that the Change Agents engaged in three main forms of broad meaning-making work: *calling to action*, *educating*, and *capturing and broadcasting stories*.

**Calling to action.** Calling to action refers to efforts to draw attention to the focal meaning and the associated cultural change initiative. Prior to the rollout of Green Future, the Change Agents created the Green Future brand, which they saw as an important way of introducing the program and differentiating it from other change initiatives and sustainability as usual. One of the Change Agents reflected: “During that period, it was really important to me to kind of have a brand associated with this. I wanted to have an official big launch where we say, ‘Look we're launching this new sustainability initiative. It’s really important for the company. This is why.’ I wanted to get people’s attention and I wanted to have a brand and a logo associated with it.” The Change Agents formally launched Green Future through a company-wide e-mail in which they provided an overview of the initiative and included an explicit call to action, challenging employees to deploy their knowledge and skills in driving sustainability for ManufactureCo and its customers. The e-mail used language that connected
'sustainability' to other central meanings in ManufactureCo’s culture, highlighting how it helps “align with the expectations of customers and protect their brands” and “can lead to unique business opportunities” (documents). The e-mail was followed by a series of “road shows” at various ManufactureCo sites and online, during which the Change Agents sought to energize and excite employees through engaging presentations. Asked about his strategy for these presentations, a Change Agent reflected:

“What I was trying to do was explain to them what sustainability meant to the company. First of all, it's been why sustainability is important, why it’s different than what I think traditionally people think it means. People just think being a bunch of tree-huggers and it doesn't apply to me. I went from back some very basic principles as to this is what is going on in the world today, and people need to understand that in terms of climate change, and resource scarcity, and urbanization. This is how companies are responding to it. This is why it’s important to our industry and to our company, and this is what you can do, this is our strategy, and this is what we need you to start thinking about.”

As part of these road shows, the Change Agents also launched a professionally-made video, which contained an introduction to Green Future and featured quintessential thriftiness by overviewing a recent innovation undertaken by an employee, who came up with the idea of washing and reusing wooden pallets by repurposing old equipment. These roadshow presentations were well received by employees and were perceived as highly engaging and inspirational. Reflecting on the video, a Site Facilities Manager noted that “[the lead Change Agent] has a terrific video of the Road Show where he tells people about the impact of doing things properly and the impact of not doing those things properly. It is very telling what he says. It helps if all at all our sites recognize this and that we want to have things like clean water and air for people. Breathing is a right, it’s you know a human right to breathe clean air.” Later during my fieldwork, the Change Agents launched five aspirational goals, intended to be stretch goals to inspire
employees to engage in sustainability-related actions, and a team of ‘Green Future Ambassadors’ to support the rollout of Green Future at their sites by, for instance, gathering data and presenting their sites’ performance against these goals.

*Educating.* The Change Agents engaged in efforts to teach employees about the focal meaning. The Change Agents’ primary approaches to education were launching their own educational events and “co-opting” existing company events and fusing sustainability into them. At the Headquarters site, with the support of the local Site Facilities team, the Change Agents integrated themselves into an annual spirit day to leverage the energy built up in the event and provoke greater interest in the principles of reuse and recycling. A Global Human Resources Analyst reflected: “They gave us this massive mountain of metal, like different types of pieces, and asked us to sort it in ways that we were able to recycle. I had no idea—is copper recyclable? There was so much education in that and it was an interesting concept.” They also, for example, launched a week-long campaign and “lunch and learns” to educate employees about waste generation and events included a program to educate women about health issues:

“We’re in the process of rolling out a program in Asia which we’ve already done in [one country in Asia] and now it's moving to [another country in Asia] […] it's a program for female employees in developing countries to teach them about health issues that are specific to women such as, cervical cancer or HIV transmission or other things like that to educate them because in those countries women traditionally don't receive a lot of education. Birth control, those types of things” (Change Agent).

*Capturing and broadcasting stories.* The Change Agents also sought to capture and broadcast as many stories as possible of employees engaging with the focal meaning at the company and in their home lives. Early on during the rollout of Green Future, when examples of engaging with sustainability were more limited and couldn’t
be attributable to Green Future, the Change Agents searched for and identified instances of employees having – at times inadvertently – engaged in sustainability-related actions. As Green Future got underway, they identified examples that had originated from Green Future. The Change Agents focused on making the stories as relatable as possible to employees and avoiding making any one employee appear to be too heroic: “The whole idea is that we don't want to have heroes here and want to feel that everybody can participate and that we can help them […] we want to give people voice and permission to care” (Change Agent). At one point, for instance, they captured and broadcasted a story of a senior leader making a public commitment to the change initiative and discussing how she tries to integrate sustainability into her work at ManufactureCo and her rationale for doing so (documents). The stories were also a tool for publicly recognizing individuals for their sustainability-related efforts. One story, for example, recognized a senior leader for coming up with an idea to use ManufactureCo’s products to help rebuild a hospital in a sustainable manner following a natural disaster (documents). The Change Agents broadcasted these stories through a variety of channels, including the company’s intranet page, via the company e-mail system, in person, and via an online sustainability community that I describe below. While the main company-wide stories were captured and broadcasted by the Change Agents, Green Future Agents and site HR and EH&S representatives also broadcasted local stories using the same general approach.

Broad meaning-making work elevates the focal meaning. As change agents engage in broad meaning-making work, it fosters cultural elevation, which refers to the
attribution of greater prominence and importance to a particular focal meaning. It does so by augmenting employees’ specific interpretations of the meaning.

In response to the Change Agents’ broad meaning-making work, many employees perceived sustainability as a greater source of pride for them. Pride stemmed from employees’ perception that the company was making a positive impact in the community, with a Site Human Resources Manager reflecting that sustainability “gives me a lot of pride and the feeling of making a difference.” This feeling grew over time as employees perceived that ManufactureCo’s focus on sustainability had been increasing: “We’ve been doing it for a number of years but we’re actually now doing more and we like to brag about it. It’s a great thing” (Contracting Manager). A Site Operations Support Analyst echoed this sentiment, suggesting that she was proud of the momentum around sustainability throughout the company:

“I'm the most proud I think of the actual [ManufactureCo employees]. Like yeah, ManufactureCo, the whole, the big corporation started the initiative, but I'm actually quite proud of how [ManufactureCo employees] have kind of joined worldwide, like across countries, and shared things that they've tried or shared initiatives or you know, even when they post things you really get a sense of pride from everybody.”

Many employees also perceived sustainability as a greater strategic priority for the company. A Site Operations Support Analyst, for example, perceived that ManufactureCo had recently committed significant resources to sustainability: “There has been a lot of focus on all the aspects of sustainability… like it’s a big push for them. The company really wants to be a frontrunner in the pack. When new things come up, [I think], we’re doing that? That’s awesome.” A Site Human Resources Director similarly reflected that ManufactureCo, in contrast with other companies, was making sustainability a larger priority: “ManufactureCo, frankly speaking, is very special, since
the corporate level is really focused on this, much more than other companies here. Maybe some talk about it, but don't really put in efforts. But ManufactureCo does.”

Finally, a Business Development Manager reflected: “When you look at our competitors such as [BigCompetitor and LargeCompetitor], they're nowhere near the same caliber as us for sustainability [...] we're doing more than we really need to in terms of [payback] to change the stock price, we're certainly doing more than we need to. That's good. We're a leader.”

Employees also discussed how this broad meaning-making work augmented these specific interpretations of ‘sustainability’. One of the Change Agents put it this way: “Without the stories and the big broad pieces [...] it'll always stay in the background, and [...] it'll never blossom. It'll never grow.” For instance, reflecting on the importance of sharing stories, a Site Supply Chain Analyst reflected that it “is good because it gets the word out that people are actively engaged in that type of thought process. I think that's been effective.” An EH&S Manager reflected on the importance of recognition: “I think recognition is important because people want to be recognized for making a difference, and because these types of things are really meaningful to employees. It goes beyond these four walls and taps into broader issues that people are connected to in their day to day lives.” Sharing stories and recognizing “translates into greater knowledge across the company and also emphasizes that we are serious about this… that it is not just a phrase. That there’s something more” (Operational Alignment VP). Finally, a Site Operations Support Analyst alluded to the role of educational events in shaping awareness of the company’s initiatives: “I think the biggest change is awareness. I think a lot of people now are more focused on it and ManufactureCo’s
done a lot to have events on site like Earth Day things and wellness seminars and having guest speakers come and speak about wellness or work life balance and charitable events.”

*Cultural elevation equips employees to engage in peripheral actions.* As suggested by the perspective that culture is a resource that can be deployed by individuals (Swidler, 1986), the elevation of a focal meaning *equips* employees to increase their engagement in *peripheral actions* – that is, actions undertaken by employees that relate to a focal meaning but do not involve their core work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.

At ManufactureCo, employees increased their engagement in a variety of actions closely linked to environmental and social sustainability that weren’t directly linked to their core work. For instance, in terms of social sustainability-related actions, employees increased their engagement in a range of wellness activities, community engagement events, and company-sponsored volunteering events. Employees in one work group, for example, began regularly organizing grassroots donation drives for the local community: “We’re doing a sporting goods drive right now […] Last year, they did bikes and this year it's sporting goods, just basically whatever you’ve got in your garage that's still usable to bring it in and it's all being donated” (Contracting Manager). Employees in another department began actively participating in an initiative to create blankets out of milk bags: “On my team they're doing this milk bag project […] they turn milk bags into I think bags and blankets and things and then I guess they get shipped over to people in need” (Site Supply Chain Analyst). In terms of environmental sustainability-related actions, employees also increased their adoption of energy reduction practices, such as turning
off their lights and computers during lunch breaks; using waste management platforms correctly; carpooling; reducing paper use; participating in a new Green Future online community to discuss sustainability; and suggesting new ideas via a new idea solicitation portal. A Global Commodities Manager reflected that “we turn off our computers at the end of the day, we turn off the printer at the end of the day, try to print as little as we can […] We also recycle… you know those bottle caps? We put those in the new bin and then recycle our waste in the right containers.” Several employees also began using an IdeaGenerationTool (described later in this section) to suggest ideas:

“There was cigarette recycling, the second was to create benches… we have a lot of skids we throw away that are broken, so we would create additional seating outside with the benches, like furniture, so they don’t go to the landfill or get burned […] And the third we are beginning now, again with Terracycle. They have these zero waste boxes that recycling anything you can think of. We are hoping to join forces with them on a few recycling paths” (Site Operations Support Analyst).

As employees began to see sustainability as a greater strategic priority and a greater source of pride for them, they increasingly prioritized peripheral sustainability actions at work: “It helps you focus and grow because without it, you will focus on production or clients. Now you can say that you have to work on this stuff as well” (EH&S Analyst). Other employees suggested that perceiving sustainability as a strategic priority makes employees perceive that they have the “permission to care” about these topics and engage in them: “People being aware they have the right and responsibility… That's the idea with the Green Future, the communication. We do want you to think about these things. Feel free […] it’s part of our culture” (Site Operations VP).

*The facilitating role of broad support work.* As cultural elevation equips employees to engage in peripheral actions, employees may need additional support to
be able to increasingly deploy this elevated meaning. Change agents facilitate employees’ engagement in peripheral actions through their *broad support work*, which refers to creating an underlying supportive infrastructure that *enables* employees to undertake actions related to a focal meaning. My analysis of the work of the Change Agents at ManufactureCo suggests three forms of broad support work: *supporting idea generation, creating engagement opportunities, and creating engagement communities.*

*Supporting idea generation.* Supporting idea generation refers to efforts to create an infrastructure for employees to suggest and implement new ideas related to the focal meaning. The main way in which the Change Agents supported idea generation was by creating a tool for suggesting ideas—the IdeaGenerationTool. They hoped that this system would give employees the opportunity to suggest new sustainability-related actions and to request support to implement them. One of the Change Agents reflected:

“The IdeaGenerationTool, I am hoping will be a more effective way of getting down to the frontline [...] The intention is, again, to reinforce to people how important this is to ManufactureCo and by sharing success stories, inspiring people to look at what they’re doing and if they have an idea, this is a place where they can bring it forward.”

Employees could log onto the tool and suggest their idea online. The Change Agents developed a process to ensure that every suggestion was acknowledged and then discussed among the team. If the idea was deemed to be suitable, a Change Agent would empower the individual who suggested the idea to put it into action, providing support and brokering connections when necessary. If the idea was deemed unsuitable, a Change Agent would try to identify ways in which the idea could be adapted or a similar idea could be pursued. If this proved to be unsuccessful, a Change Agent would inform the employee that their idea is unfeasible. Reflections of the employee who had
been described above as suggesting a variety of activities capture these elements of the process quite well:

“I think if all the tools we had were like [the IdeaGenerationTool] then a lot of things would happen. It’s very quick, you are fully involved. Right from the beginning, even how quickly you get a reply. Whether it’s a let’s look at this, let’s not, whatever, you literally submit your idea and a couple days later you’re like, wow, I already have an e-mail? Let’s get rolling, let’s do this, let’s talk to this person, and let’s get things going [...] I participated in everything. For example, the cigarette waste… of course we didn’t have a process in place so I was involved in getting the bins set up, ordering the bins, receiving the bins, getting them installed, and then for the first trial period I was the one emptying the bins to see how it was and what its like, timing it to see like how long it takes to dump this vs before. And then the shipping, I was involved in creating the process to get them shipped out. I was also involved in choosing the charity, and now in the shipment. They literally involve you in every step of the way.”

Creating engagement opportunities. Creating engagement opportunities refers to efforts to create specific, structured events and activities designed to enable employees to engage in actions related to the focal meaning. The Change Agents and their supporters also created a wide range of engagement opportunities for employees throughout the organization. These opportunities spanned both social and environmental sustainability. On the environmental front, one of the Change Agents launched an initiative in which he and members of a Site Facilities team removed the garbage bins from employees’ desks to nudge people to recycle more:

“[A Change Agent] suggested we do this. And he brought in [a member of the Site Facilities team] and said, yep, I am game to try it on the team. And so we tried to do this anonymously to start with to see what kind of waste you guys are creating on a weekly basis. So they set it up so that they would do the waste collection rather than the janitors for a couple weeks. They did that, sorted through and saw what we were putting in the waste basket, that could have been diverted. A couple of weeks later, which I guess was about last week, they came to our department meeting and said, OK, we’ve been doing this. We want to share the results. And the team was like, OK, that’s a good idea” (Site Supply Chain Manager).
On the social sustainability front, the Change Agents and those supporting their work created a variety of engagement events touching on topics including healthy eating, wellness, and community engagement. An example of this was a Change Agent’s initiative to create opportunities for employees to engage with new immigrants from the community surrounding the Headquarters site:

“What I did was I reached out to the talent pool and found people who had transitioned to [ManufactureCo’s home country] at some point in their life. What I did was have them talk about their day to day work and how it differed from their experiences working in the place that they previously lived. They talked about that. They talked a little bit about the expectations of [ManufactureCo’s home country]’s workforce. I was able to arrange for people from Finance, from Engineering, from IT to talk about how they’ve gone through these changes, then also showcase a little bit about [ManufactureCo’s home country]” (Change Agent).

The Green Future Agents also created a range of engagement opportunities at their sites. For instance, one Green Future Agent created a nursery garden in which employees could gain experience taking care of plants and, ultimately, take these plants home or to their office. Another created several opportunities for employees to exercise, such as sporting events, and engage with the community, such as partnerships with local schools.

Creating engagement communities. Finally, creating engagement communities refers to efforts to create platforms for employees to engage with each other about actions related to the focal meaning. The Change Agents created an online engagement community, GreenWorkspaces, which had two main functions: a pledge consisting of a set of sustainability-related actions employees could engage in (such as reducing meat consumption and turning off lights), and a message board on which employees could post topics, like and comment on the posts of others, and interact with
each other. When asked about the rationale for GreenWorkspaces, a Change Agent argued that:

“I think we have to hit things in a different way. That’s like the social media kind of approach. Different things appeal to different parts of the workforce. The people that are younger and savvier want to post things, see who joined, comment, etc. They are used to that so it works great for them… You can’t just use the one way to get to all people.”

The Change Agents were active on GreenWorkspaces, engaging with other users and posting their own content.

My analysis of the data suggests that the Change Agents’ broad support work was important in enabling employees to increasingly engage in peripheral sustainability actions. When a Contracting Manager was asked whether employees would have engaged in as many fitness and community engagement events without structured engagement activities, he responded: “Not as much. Sure, they would if they had an opportunity, but if the company puts the opportunity there and makes it easy for you. All you need do is sign up and show up pretty well. It's great. It makes it so much easier.”

An Intern working with the Green Future team echoed this sentiment: “I think it would be more difficult to find things to do. It's hard to find things to volunteer for on your own, especially because some people just find it more daunting to be by themselves. I think definitely the company organizing certain things helps people to want to be able to participate.” The launch of the IdeaGenerationTool made it easier for employees to suggest sustainability-related ideas: “I think even just to have suggestions, like the [IdeaGenerationTool] I think has given people permission to make suggestions and to propose ideas, which is something that they wouldn’t have done prior to the Green Future launch” (Communications Manager). Finally, the discussions on
GreenWorkspaces inspired employees and helped them think of a broader range of potential peripheral sustainability actions to engage in: “It’s good because we can see activities from other sites and then we can see how other people are doing and what the other activities are. So, it is like a central point of information that everyone can see” (Site Supply Chain Manager).

**Cultural reinforcement.** As suggested by recent work that finds an iterative relationship between actions and culture (Giorgi et al., 2015), when employees experience success in engaging in peripheral actions, it reinforces the elevation of the focal meaning in a process I term cultural reinforcement (a situation where changes in actions and meanings are mutually reinforcing), which is represented by the bottom-most arrow in the middle of Figure 1. Employees discussed how engaging in peripheral sustainability actions elevated ‘sustainability’. For example, a Site Supply Chain Manager mentioned that participating in community engagement activities made him feel “glad that there were opportunities to do that, and that ManufactureCo was supportive of things like that,” reinforcing the interpretation that sustainability was valued at ManufactureCo. A Site Operations Support Analyst’s comments suggest that she perceived sustainability to be a greater source of pride after seeing through one of her ideas:

“When its set and its going you really feel good, like when I see those bins out there, I feel like I really did it, did all the hard work behind it. It’s nice to look back and feel like it’s kind of your baby. Now we divert this because of an idea they took seriously.”

Employees also discussed how they subsequently began engaging in more peripheral sustainability actions, as in the case of a Site Operations Support Analyst:
“Before it was like okay, I'll do this with you guys. It sounds like fun. Now it's like well, what other things can we do, so not just physically going out to do these events to help let's say the homeless or whatever, but even in-house we have collections for people who are going back out into the workforce. Or students that can't afford prom or any of those kinds of things.”

Similarly, a Site Supply Chain Manager reflected on how she saw an increase in people setting up their own volunteer and community engagement activities:

“I think people are much more aware of it. Some groups have actually gone and organized their own volunteer days after we organized a couple for them, which is good. People are going out and volunteering, and coordinating their own volunteer food bank days now.”

Greater awareness of how ManufactureCo was prioritizing sustainability played a role:

“People are much more aware of our sustainability goals, and alignment, and activities then they were last year” (Site Supply Chain Manager).

Summary of the cultural elevation pathway. As change agents engage in broad meaning-making work such as calling to action, educating, and capturing and broadcasting stories, the focal meaning becomes elevated, equipping employees to engage in peripheral actions. Broad support work undertaken by change agents such as supporting idea generation and creating engagement communities enables employees to engage in these peripheral actions. As employees successfully engage in peripheral actions, the elevation of a focal meaning can become further reinforced, in turn, equipping employees to engage in more peripheral actions through a process of cultural reinforcement. In contrast, while broad meaning-making work and broad support work enable increased engagement in peripheral actions, they do not appear to help integrate a focal meaning into other meanings and, ultimately, into employees’ core work. In the next section, I discuss how these outcomes could be engendered through different forms of direct cultural change work.
4.4 The Cultural Integration Pathway

In the cultural integration pathway, a focal meaning is integrated into other cultural meanings, which I term cultural integration. As change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work, they help foster cultural integration by building connections between the focal meaning and employees’ work in ways that are specific, grounded, and tangible. Cultural integration equips employees to engage in integrated actions related to a focal meaning. Because employees may need support in deploying this new resource, change agents engage in tailored support work, which facilitates employees’ engagement in integrated actions in two ways: enabling them, and dampening the constraining effects of select other meanings through a process of cultural dampening. As employees successfully engage in integrated actions, the integration of a focal meaning becomes reinforced through a process of cultural reinforcement. In the sections below, I describe each of the phases of this pathway by drawing on the work of the Change Agents undertaking Green Future. Figure 2 illustrates this pathway and captures the first-order codes underpinning each of the second-order categories.

--- Insert Figure 2 about here ---

**Change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work.** Drawing on Sonenshein’s (2016) conceptualization of meaning-making, I define tailored meaning-

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7 As noted earlier, some departments were already engaging in integrated sustainability actions to some extent and perceived some integration of ‘sustainability’ with other meanings prior to the launch of Green Future. Despite their more advanced starting point from other work groups, the pathway described in this section applies to these groups as well, as they generally experienced an amplification of these outcomes as a result of the Change Agents’ direct cultural change work through the mechanisms described in this section.
making work as efforts to advance interpretations of a focal meaning, customized to a particular audience, typically through direct interactions. In their interactions with particular groups of employees at ManufactureCo, the Change Agents engaged in four forms of tailored meaning-making work: **reframing work around the focal meaning**, **conveying specific risks and threats of existing interpretations**, **conveying specific benefits of the focal meaning**, and **seeding opportunities**.

**Reframing work around the focal meaning.** Reframing work around the focal meaning involves change agents demonstrating to employees how their current and future daily work and projects impact and are impacted by the focal meaning. One of the Change Agents, for instance, approached a Sales team that sells post-consumer and repair solutions and helped them see how the services they sell have a significantly lower environmental impact than recycling:

“I think we saw a couple of [...] big lessons that I integrated into [the department] have stuck. One is the definition that after market repair is sustainable, right? Repair is more important than recycling. So, like you know the three Rs? Often people lose focus on... like they think they recycle and are doing great. Recycling is the least valuable. I think people get most hung up on recycling, because it is something they do at home. But recycling is the lowest value. So, reframing after market as a sustainable business that is focused on repair, which is more valuable than recycling, was a lesson that really stuck home” (Change Agent).

This Change Agent used a similar approach when interacting with a Global Transport team, where she demonstrated how their daily work affects the company’s greenhouse gas emissions and how their transportation network optimizations have a positive environmental impact. A Global Transport Manager from this group later reflected:

“When you throw out some of the numbers that she’s given us, people are like wow, that’s crazy. So people are getting really excited about it. It's one thing to save $50,000, and also burning less rubber, less diesel exhaust, it’s all good stuff. But to hear that the
reduced carbon footprint planted that many trees and parks, that’s awesome, right?”. Similarly, another Change Agent identified employees who had submitted continuous improvement forms on topics such as error proofing to help them see that their ideas also had sustainability impacts such as reducing waste generation:

“At lunch, I asked [the Change Agent] about him going through the kaizen\(^8\) proposals and he said he started going through the ones for Headquarters to see if any of them have a link between sustainability and savings […] He told me that he started meeting with each of the people to ask about the concrete savings and also to reframe how their initiatives were actually linked to sustainability” (field notes).

Conveying specific risks and threats of existing interpretations. Conveying specific risks and threats of existing interpretations refers to challenging employees’ existing interpretations of a focal meaning by highlighting their risks and potential negative consequences. An example of this took place in one Change Agent’s interactions with a Global Purchasing team. A Change Agent surfaced potential business risks and financial consequences for that team by leveraging the impact of a catastrophic event faced by a competitor: “We challenged the [Global Purchasing] guys [by saying] we have thousands of suppliers that we’re using, how do you know based on your current processes if you’re promoting one of these [famous catastrophes at a competitor site]?” As another example, another Change Agent borrowed an infrared (IR) camera to show a team of Site Operations employees how much energy was being wasted in the way they do their work: “I started with the IR camera and taking photos of the manufacturing line. You can see the dark blue vent, and then the red tester radiating

\(^8\) At ManufactureCo, a kaizen refers to a continuous improvement initiative undertaken by an employee to improve some aspect of her or his work. It is typically small in scope and does not involve a large expenditure of time or resources.
heat. So you pump cold air at 18 degrees Celsius directly down to this 70-degree tester. Those juxtapositions really visualize it to people.”

*Conveying specific benefits of the focal meaning.* Conveying specific benefits of the focal meaning refers to highlighting how the focal meaning can help employees deliver on existing priorities. A Change Agent, for example suggested to various Site Operations and Site Human Resources employees how the lens of sustainability could help reduce turnover and increase retention: “We talked about turnover, we talked about retention and what we would do to retain our employees. I frame it in a way that matters to that functional leader but also helps contribute to the final goal [...] because everybody has a different viewpoint.” Similarly, attentive to ManufactureCo’s strong ‘customer orientation’, another Change Agent communicated to a Global Materials team the potential brand benefits of incorporating sustainability into their communications about inventory to their customers: “The fact that [a Change Agent] was able to say that some of the key customers were engaged with or interested, it got the director’s attention” (Global Materials Analyst). This Change Agent also communicated to a Sales team how sustainability could be a powerful brand proposition for their team as customers were increasingly interested in purchasing from sustainable companies:

“Really the conversation I had was about the direction that our customers were going [...] So what I was able to do was show these guys that our customers care about sustainability. They’re staking part of their brand on it and not only that, they’re assessing us to a certain degree on our sustainability through the scorecard process” (Change Agent).

*Seeding opportunities.* Finally, seeding opportunities refers to suggesting specific ways in which employees could integrate the focal meaning into their work. A Change Agent, for instance, presented a Global Purchasing team with a list of companies and
their best practices associated with sustainable procurement: "We met with [the Change Agent] and asked… what are the best companies doing? He gave a list […] things like buying sustainable stuff, integrating with vendors on sustainability" (Global Purchasing Director). Another Change Agent, for example, presented a Sales team with a variety of actions they could consider in order to integrate sustainability into their work, as captured in my field notes from the end of an initial meeting she had with the team:

"[The Change Agent] discussed the possibility of running an ad hoc analysis internally to see how they would rank and the team agreed that they can help him get the information. The conversation then turned to customers, and [the Change Agent] said that that this could be a ‘wedge’ to beat out the competitors in customers. On the last slide, there was a set of actions they could take, including dimensional weight and looking at customer profiles and finding advantages. […] There was also a discussion around framing the optimizations around the triple bottom line. [The Change Agent] said ‘so you may have done some of these optimizations… they have a huge carbon impact and you could tell a story about that and communicate it internally and to your customers’” (field notes).

**Tailored meaning-making work integrates the focal meaning.** As change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work, it fosters *cultural integration*, which refers to the integration of a focal meaning into other meanings that comprise the organization’s culture. It does so by forging connections between the focal meaning and employees’ work that are tangible, grounded, and specific, leading employees to interpret the focal meaning as related to their work and actionable within their work.

Within pockets of ManufactureCo, I observed that ‘sustainability’ became integrated with three other meanings: ‘customer orientation’, ‘thrifty’, and ‘innovation in a box’.

‘Sustainability’ and ‘customer orientation’ became integrated in the sense that sustainability became seen as a means of delivering increased customer value to current and future customers. Reflecting on his interactions with one of the Change Agents, a Global Materials Analyst noted that he began to see how he could use
sustainability to deliver on customer commitments within his role: “I can see now how I can support sustainability, especially if it's important to our customers […] I wasn't even aware that this was something that other companies are looking at.” Sustainability also began to be seen as a way of differentiating ManufactureCo’s customer offerings from those of its competitors. One Sales Director reflected on how sustainability “is one more bullet on there on how we can align with the customers […] It helps us stand out and be different. We are in an industry where we all of us companies look the same and we want to avoid the commodity price game.” This connection between sustainability and customer value extended beyond external customers to include internal customers as well. For instance, a Global Human Resources Manager reflected that sustainability could help her department broaden its offering to its internal customers by providing unique forms of value:

“Yes, because we're looked at as a cost centre. From a business perspective, obviously cutting down cost while still delivering service and maybe even better service would be better looked at from our business perspective, from our client perspective. Could we win any additional awards? We could from an HR perspective, because there's different awards as well that, you know best place to work best employers et cetera.”

The integration between ‘sustainability’ and ‘thrifty’ centred on the interpretation that sustainability could be a means of identifying novel ways of reducing costs. In the Global Transport group, for instance, ‘sustainability’ increasingly shifted from being something seen as an add-on to employees’ work to something that could help unlock new ways of reducing transportation and logistics costs: “Well it used to be the 3Rs here you know, back in the 80’s and 90’s. That’s all kind of second nature, you know? So now sustainability is more about things like how can we maximize containers. So instead of three or four containers, how can we reduce the number of containers, both
from cost and Co2 emission perspectives?” (Global Transport Manager). A Global Materials Analyst echoed this sentiment, describing how she began to see a strong connection between sustainability and keeping inventory down to reduce costs, which was a traditional focus of her work: “I always thought that sustainability was about adding costs. And now I see that sustainability could be used to help cut costs as well. It’s very similar to what we do. Like at the [Headquarters] site, a focus is on keeping inventory down, which is similar to the idea of sustainability.” Overall, in pockets of the organization, integrating sustainability into employees’ work was seen as a “no brainer”, because “there is definitely a link to finances” (Global Transport Director).

Finally, as ‘sustainability’ became integrated with ‘innovation in a box’, sustainability began to be seen by some employees as a new lens through which to identify new innovations and kaizens. At a conceptual level, sustainability become more closely connected to continuous improvement in employees’ day-to-day work: “What I find in talking about sustainability to many people is that a lot of the practices of sustainability are almost like lean principles” (Global Transport Director). It also became seen as a way to help unlock new innovations: “It’s really interesting… going lean and going green is very important to help you get monetary savings and environmental benefits” (Global Transport Manager). In addition, the integration between ‘sustainability’ and ‘innovation in a box’ served to expand the box within which employees perceived they could innovate. A Site Facilities Manager, for example, reflected on how he didn’t use to see waste management as something to innovate around, but began to do so once he saw the potential connection:
“Site Facilities Manager: To be honest, here and even in my own personal experience we didn’t pay any attention on waste. We just got a contractor and they took aware of everything. I don’t think a lot of companies paid any attention on this.

Researcher: Did Green Future influence this?

Site Facilities Manager: “I think it gives me a thought and a way to think about how you can improve your profit and also what is the space for further improving on this recycling. Especially how this waste is generated and transported in the weight station and how they were disposed by the contractor. It gives you a way to think and opportunity to improve, and it is very good. I think meeting with [a Change Agent] really made me realize it can be about profit as well and a good opportunity.”

A closer integration between ‘sustainability’ and ‘innovation in a box’ was thus manifested in the conceptual connections employees perceived between the two meanings, perceptions that sustainability can help unlock new ways through which to look for innovations, and that the box in which employees are able to innovate has expanded to include sustainability.

Employees at ManufactureCo who had exposure to tailored meaning-making work reflected that they increasingly perceived sustainability as something related to their work and as something actionable. First, employees began interpreting their work as closely related to sustainability and perceiving that the output of their work has an impact on sustainability considerations. A Global Transport Manager reflected that he began seeing his team’s work as having impacts on greenhouse gas emissions: “I have an image in mind that every drop in fuel is carbon from the fossils. So, it motivates me to think about those optimizations and to focus on minimization.” A Global Transport Analyst became increasingly cognizant of the impact of her department’s work on sustainability:

“For me it’s thinking of supply chain processes… keeping in mind when we’re shipping things from really far to other places, like when you’re shipping from
suppliers all the way to China and then adding value to it, so you can imagine we’re spending a lot on logistics. So when we make decisions, it’s about being cognizant of the impact we have, not just on the price. Thinking more longitudinally in our role.”

Tailored meaning-making work helped advance the interpretation that sustainability was related to employees’ work. For instance, a Global Materials Analyst reflected that a Change Agent’s reframing of his work “just opened this other dimension that's very applicable to what I do that I didn’t know existed or that I didn’t even know was important to what I was doing.” A colleague similarly noted that she would not have seen her work as related to sustainability had she not met with a Change Agent:

“I have been engaged a lot more with [a Change Agent] in the last month and she is talking about it a lot more in the bigger picture, you know the customer-related stuff that inspires me, you know that there is a team working on things much better than site level, itsy bitsy sort of shutting down power and stuff like that. So I think I see that, but I don’t think many people do. Like if it hadn’t been through one of my team members having an interest interview with [a Change Agent], I would not have found out about it and how we can help or sort of have this” (Global Materials Manager).

Second, employees also began to interpret sustainability as something actionable—that is, as something they could influence by making changes in the way they perform their own daily work. A Global Transport Director began seeing that she could address sustainability considerations by changing some departmental practices, as exemplified in an interaction she had with a Change Agent that I observed: “The logic behind this is just a no brainer. I mean I just don’t see what problem there could be with the double stacking of pallets… it just makes sense. Why would you use two docks? And use two containers? We’re going to start looking now at all of our containers to see how much we are filling them so that we avoid just sending air” (field notes). A Global Materials Analyst reflected: “Connecting with [a Change Agent] gave me a whole new view of how we could deploy [sustainability].” One of the Change Agents noticed that
many employees with whom she had interacted with about improving working conditions were increasingly interpreting sustainability as something they could affect through their work:

“I saw some glimmers of hope by people who joined saying, ‘We can't change’ and ended by saying, ‘We have to make this happen, let’s make this happen.’ I did notice a shift in the two days and we were all hopeful as we were leaving that this was going to be something we could focus on going forward.”

As with the interpretation that sustainability was related to their work, tailored meaning-making work helped forge this interpretation that sustainability is something actionable. When asked about when she had started to see sustainability as related to and valuable to her work, a Site Operations Director reflected:

“I think for me it is that I started this when I talked to [a Change Agent], honestly. Because honestly when I started doing operations for [a large customer] I only took care of this for two years and it was super busy. I myself didn’t pay attention for this kind of energy, right? Until I had a chance to sit down with [a Change Agent] and she talked about [a large customer] and its energy. That made me think, this could be a very big benefit for our operations.”

The Site Facilities Manager who began to perceive ‘sustainability’ as integrated with ‘innovation in a box’ similarly reflected how his interpretations evolved based on his interactions with a Change Agent: “Before I joined ManufactureCo and the [working group] conference calls, I didn’t know or think about this and put my eyes on this and what I can do to make more profit in this way.”

**Cultural integration equips employees to engage in integrated actions.**

Viewing culture as a resource, cultural integration *equips* employees to increase their engagement in *integrated actions*, which I define as actions undertaken by employees that relate to the focal meaning and involve their core work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.
As I observed the integration of ‘sustainability’ into select meanings in pockets of ManufactureCo, I also observed employees leveraging these integrated meanings in increasingly altering (or discussing their intention to alter) their own core work, what I call integrated sustainability actions. I identified four sub-categories of integrated sustainability actions. First, employees improved working conditions for other employees. In analyzing the causes of excessive working hours, Site Human Resources and Site Operations employees identified working conditions as a major factor and began undertaking a wide range of actions. These included increasing employee training and skill development, improving living conditions, and better tracking hours worked (field notes, documents). Second, employees incorporated sustainability into the customer value proposition. Some Sales teams, for instance, began incorporating sustainability into their regular communications with customers and into new customer proposals: “[My team] looks at customer webpages and reports to understand the customers’ sustainability focus. So, they are constantly learning in that way and then bringing it back into [our customer] offerings” (Sales VP). Third, employees quantified and reduced the impact of core work processes. A Global Transport department, for example, began calculating the environmental impact of its shipping practices and identifying ways to reduce that impact. A Global Transport Director reflected: “This year we finally sat down and said: Let’s look at packaging. Let’s look at how much we put on our container. Let’s try to reduce that.” A Site Operations team at one of ManufactureCo’s international sites recently launched an initiative, GreenMachine, focused on certifying equipment at different levels based on the extent to which employees are able to reduce electrical consumption:
"We have the [GreenMachine] program [...] they are trying to get action on kaizens to improve electrical consumption on machines. So they want to do kaizens for machines and then they get [a GreenMachine certification] for successfully implementing a kaizen improvement" (Lean Manager).

Fourth and finally, employees became interested in integrating sustainability into purchasing decisions by, for instance, soliciting and gathering information on suppliers’ sustainability performance and including this performance as a selection criterion. A Global Purchasing team, for example, expressed a desire to implement these actions in the near term: “Within a year or two we expect to incorporate into our RFQ process for all vendors, especially those that deal with chemicals, questions around recycling and sustainability behaviours” (Global Purchasing Director).

I observed that the integration of ‘sustainability’ with other meanings was an important precursor of employees’ undertaking these actions. As one Change Agent put it, “you need to do that initial reframe for them, but then once you’ve done that, it’s something that’s then in their toolkit [...] it becomes a tool that then they can explore the other uses for.” At ManufactureCo, integrating ‘sustainability’ with ‘customer orientation’ helped employees deliver on customer priorities in a differentiated manner, which was a priority for Sales teams: “[It’s] anything for a sale. They’ve probably done their research, the customer cares about sustainability, so we’re putting it in” (Change Agent). Similarly, integrating ‘sustainability’ with ‘thrifty’ helped employees identify novel ways of reducing costs, which was an imperative at the company. A Lean Consultant alluded to how ‘thrifty’ was a dominant lens through which employees approached their work: “I'd like to think that a lot of people that I have experience with are very open. They're open to the idea, but then there's a lens, is this the right business decision?” Integrating ‘sustainability’ into that lens could help drive new actions, because “usually when you
find an environmental benefit there is a cost benefit and vice versa. It could help people look at things a bit differently and possibly see some things they didn’t see before” (Site Operations Analyst). Finally, integrating ‘sustainability’ with ‘innovation in a box’ was seen as critical in equipping employees to engage in integrated sustainability actions because of the crucial role of continuous improvement in the organization:

“I think really that as far as the mentality, as ManufactureCo goes, being able to link it to continuous improvement is probably one of the best ways of getting it into people’s heads, if there’s a way that that can be done because the continuous improvement element has been mandated and is part of people’s day-to-day consciousness now” (Site Supply Chain Analyst).

A Lean Consultant reflected that this broader lens can help employees approach their work in a more holistic way: “The more ways you look at things, the better it is. Right? You look at it as an entire system instead of just one little module at a time.” A Sales Engineering Analyst captured how this broader lens could result in greater environmental and cost benefits:

“I would say that it comes down to a greater awareness and understanding of the big picture. For example, if someone in our supply chain organization is looking at procuring a bill of materials for a certain product, and they say well, I can go to ten different vendors, and I’ll get the lowest possible cost. If I go into ten different vendors, you’re incurring a lot of additional packaging and freight expense. That person may not have visibility to that side of the equation. This is one of those areas where education might help connect the dots with the bigger picture, and say yes you get the absolute lowest possible cost for the material by spreading it out and going to ten different vendors. But when you take into account the bottom-line cost and the environmental impact of all that freight and packaging, we might actually have a better bottom-line impact, and better triple bottom-line impact if we break that down to two different suppliers, and they provide us a kit that... allows us to combine items into one package and one shipment.”

**Tailored support work and its enabling and dampening effects.** As cultural integration equips employees to engage in integrated actions, employees may need additional support to be able to deploy this resource. Change agents can facilitate
employees’ engagement in integrated actions through *tailored support work*, which refers to work undertaken to enable others to undertake actions related to a focal meaning, customized to employees’ individual work. The Change Agents engaged in several forms of tailored support work in their interactions with employees, namely *brokering relationships, providing data and insights, providing technical support and tools, supporting brainstorming, providing communications support, and providing fire cover*. Change Agents undertook this work both individually and in groups. My analysis also suggests two ways in which tailored support work facilitates employees’ engagement in integrated actions: by *enabling* employees to deploy newly-integrated meanings, and through *cultural dampening*, which refers to a process through which the constraining effects of select cultural elements is diminished. Below, I overview each of these forms of tailored support work and then discuss tailored support work’s enabling and dampening effects.

*Brokering relationships.* Brokering relationships refers to support work in which change agents introduce and connect employees to other parties that can support them with integrated actions. Two of the Change Agents created a working group connecting individuals working on energy, water, and waste management across ManufactureCo’s sites, and one Change Agent created a working group to connect a group of employees working on wellness issues with each other. These groups were meant to be spaces in which these employees could connect to colleagues working on similar topics and problems and share ideas together. Within these working groups, the Change Agents also strove to connect working group members with other employees who could be a
helpful resource. One of the Change Agents put it this way during one of the meetings I observed:

“For the guest speakers… this goes two ways. Are there any speakers you would like to hear from? Last month we had somebody present on LED lighting and an agreement that was put in place. But if there are other companies and other information you would like to have, please let us know who they are. The other side is, if you worked on a project at your site, we would potentially look for you to present at this call” (field notes).

The Change Agents also connected individual employees in more informal and less structured ways. For instance, one of the Change Agents was supporting Site Operations employees at one of the international sites with engaging in new actions to improve their energy literacy. Recognizing that a connection with the Site Facilities team would help the Site Operations team enact these changes through creating synergies, the Change Agent connected them together:

“What I found is that they already had some level of energy awareness and it was really tapping into it and provoking further thoughts and further discussions, and then facilitating a conversation between the [Site Facilities] team and the [Site Operations] team, brokering that relationship between the two groups. By then making those two relationships work well together, what we're finding is that we're able to collaborate and get the data so that then we can make good choices on what we're doing” (Change Agent).

Providing data and insights. Providing data and insights refers to supplying data, intelligence, and information relevant to the link between a focal meaning and employees’ core work. The abovementioned Change Agent who brokered connections between the Site Operations and Site Facilities teams also provided the Site Operations group with relevant data for them to be able to enact the new energy saving practices. Previously, the Site Operations group only had access to data about total energy consumption, but found that this data was insufficient to make more fine-grained
improvements. The Change Agent in this case provided more fine-grained data about the energy consumption of various lines and machines:

“[The Change Agent] supported a lot. As I mentioned previously […] we didn’t have organized data. We didn’t know how to start it. When you want to start something, you need to have the data to know what the top consumption is, not just the total cost of energy. [The Change Agent] came and organized us with this data. With this organized data, we can use this as a way to start the product” (Site Operations Director).

As another example, in one of the working groups organized by the Change Agents, one participant, a Site Facilities Manager was discussing implementing LED lightbulbs to save energy, but was unsure about the suitability of various bulbs. One of the Change Agents responded, asking whether it would help if he were to compile a list of all the different lightbulbs used throughout the company (field notes).

Providing technical support and tools. Providing technical support and tools refers to support work in which change agents provide tools, solutions, and hands-on technical support to help employees engage in new integrated actions. One of the Change Agents, for example, developed a set of tools that a Sales team could use in order to begin to calculate the carbon savings from its repair solutions: “I also showed them [and] built a tool that was really easy to use and I built it for things like an iPad mini, a large screen phone, a set top box, a DVR set top box, and I basically built a whole suite of tools to make it into a small toolkit.” In reflecting on why this was important, this Change Agent argued that “not everybody else cares enough to put in the extra effort. So, if you are asking them to spend three hours coming up with a calculator coming up with a calculation, they won’t do it. But if I ask them to spend three minutes putting in three numbers they already have and then spit out something, they
are much more likely to do that.” Two other Change Agents created a tool to capture and share sites’ improvement actions around waste, energy, and water and to calculate their sustainability benefits (field notes). Their rationale was that this tool could help the employees across sites collaborate and work through the financial and sustainability benefits of their work. In addition to creating tools, the Change Agents also provided hands-on technical support. For instance, the Change Agent that created the carbon calculation tools also initially helped the teams in running these calculations, and another Change Agent helped identify relevant documentation for a site considering implementing ISO 50001.

Supporting brainstorming. Supporting brainstorming refers to support work in which change agents support employees in generating potential ways in which they could engage in integrated actions. One of the Change Agents, for example, brainstormed innovative solutions for reducing waste generation with a Site Facilities Manager. The Site Facilities Manager had completed a waste audit and wasn’t sure whether anything could be done with one particular type of material. The Change Agent described his approach to supporting idea generation:

“They’ve got a full waste audit, and they know that they got 13% of their waste if they don’t have a home for it. A good chunk of that is foam. Because in the local area within two or three hundred kilometers, there’s no one handling. The foam today goes to landfill […] there is no choice to recycle it, fine. [The focus] now is trying to think of what else can we do, how can you prevent it from coming in? Are you getting all … is 80% of your foam coming in from one box? If it’s all coming in from one type of material can you prevent it? Is there something that we can do there that would be… that could go to recycling? Could it be packed in be scrumpled up like a heavy carton paper? Or the air bags. It’s like a zip lock bag that you fill with… it blows up a patch. It conforms to whatever is inside. You could use those.”
Another Change Agent described how she helped a member of the Global Transport team come up with an innovative solution to use dimensional weight principles to reduce the carbon footprint and cost of shipments:

“[The Global Transport employee] found the solution. I didn’t find anything for [her]. It’s in her wheelhouse, she’s the expert. What I did for her, if I did anything, was let her talk and provided her some ideas that seeded the brainstorming, and then I just kept looking at other ideas and helped brainstorm through the triple bottom line mentality… like what would do this for social? So it’s just being an environmental facilitator, just like the lean facilitator asks questions. So I just help brainstorm sustainability-related questions and helping draw out sustainability related values.”

*Providing communications support.* Providing communications support refers to support work in which change agents provide employees with advice on how they could successfully sell integrated action ideas among their colleagues and their managers. At ManufactureCo, in many cases, employees were not mandated to engage in any integrated sustainability actions and, instead, were in a situation where they had to persuade others to support them. For instance, some Facilities employees struggled to get projects approved that exceeded a certain payback period. Two of the Change Agents regularly offered to help improve the framing of these projects in order to make the projects more attractive to managers, and to look for ways to combine solutions across multiple sites to reduce their total cost (field notes). Another Change Agent sat down with several Global Transport and Global Materials employees who were not sure about how to get their leaders to support their ideas around sustainability:

“It was interesting to see them start to think about how they could help their boss. I took them through some of the how to influence your boss, how to support your CEO or your senior leader, and how to be a change agent [concepts]. I flipped those up and they were like, okay, yeah, okay. The trajectory of the meeting was interesting because it went from a hope to no hope to let’s have a real talk,
which, then let’s level set and then it went up throughout the meeting to where, at the end of the meeting, everybody was pumped and engaged” (Change Agent).

Providing fire cover. Finally, providing fire cover refers to efforts to ensure that employees could save face as much as possible if they weren’t successful in their engagement in integrated actions. For instance, when one of the Change Agents traveled to a site to support Site Operations employees in implementing their new energy saving initiatives, she focused on avoiding any of her colleagues at the site potentially losing face if the initiative weren’t successful:

“There's a risk in me going over and I find nothing, or I find that it's only a couple thousand dollars. That could blow up in my face but I'm okay with that. I'll be the first one to say that that was a failure, and I'll take full credibility for that. It won't be [an employee with whom we worked], it'll be me. Those are the risk rewards with all of this stuff” (Change Agent).

The enabling effect of tailored support work. I observed that all of these forms of Change Agents’ tailored support work can enable employees to engage in integrated sustainability actions (deploying the newly-integrated meaning of ‘sustainability’). One of the Change Agents recognized the importance of support work using the metaphor of hitting a nail with a hammer: “This is this iterative competency loop, in my opinion. The first time […] what you can do is you can grab their hand, grab the hammer, and actually make the first couple of connections for them.” Reflecting on the benefits and importance of brokering relationships, a Site Facilities Manager from one of ManufactureCo’s international sites argued that the working groups are a “very good sounding board to share best practice” and that if he were only operating as a standalone organization, it would be much more difficult to undertake projects: “That sort of thing will be far, far more difficult […] it certainly wouldn’t be as easy, no. No, absolutely not.” The Change Agents’ provision of data and insights helped employees
see tangible ways in which they could integrate sustainability into their work and helped them come up with new ideas. A Global Transport Director's comments captured this effect:

"Having conversations with [a Change Agent] gets you to think about things differently. She is also connecting in with our customers and is connecting in with like organizations and customers. She is able to bring that back to us on the business side. She approaches us and says that [a large customer], for example, is looking for a better way and asks: what can we do? Having somebody drive that for us it a big help. The [Green Future news updates] and all that isn't really the catalyst."

The provision of technical support and tools provided important insights and expertise without which it would have been difficult to successfully integrate sustainability into employees' work:

"From my view, I can now work with [A Change Agent] to quantify things outside the financial analysis. Somebody who has the tools to help me do that. Previously I couldn't measure things like greenhouse emissions. [A Change Agent] has come up with solutions to be able to do that. I can go to somebody who I can rely on and have conversations about that" (Global Transport Director).

Brainstorming was also crucial as a way to help employees revisit their work through the lens of sustainability, helping employees identify concrete ways in which they could make changes to their core work and unlock new ideas. A Change Agent reflected on how her brainstorming helped an employee identify new potential integrated sustainability actions: “This is where to me the triple bottom line really is resonant because she was just approaching the problem as a cost down, cost down, cost down. When she started brainstorming about environmental she reached her cost down but by looking at that problem in that new light.” Tailored support work, thus, enabled employees to deploy their integrated meanings into integrated sustainability actions.
The dampening effect of tailored support work. In addition, change agents’ tailored support work can also help to dampen the constraining effect that some meanings may have on employees’ willingness and ability to engage in integrated sustainability actions. At ManufactureCo, I observed that some form of tailored support work was able to dampen the constraining effects of ‘failure aversion’, ‘detail and procedural orientation’, ‘drinking from the firehose’, and ‘thrifty’.

For instance, ‘failure aversion’ appeared to have a powerful constraining effect on employees’ engagement in integrated sustainability actions because it made employees wary of engaging in new actions that weren't tested, previously-legitimated, or de-risked. A Global Human Resources Manager described the effect this way: “We’re extremely risk averse. Taking that first step, it's always people looking on, ‘I'm not going to take the step. Are you going to take the step? I don't know about this.’ [...] if it fails, nobody wants to take the blame for failing.” This constraining effect was particularly salient in cases where new actions involved a financial outlay: “If there is any sort of financial involvement then yes, they are going to be risk averse and not potentially come forth with any ideas” (Site Supply Chain Manager). Tailored support work helped dampen this effect. For instance, providing fire cover helped dampen this constraining effect by reducing the risk and costs of failure that could stem from engaging in new actions. Providing insights about other organizations’ sustainability-related actions also helped legitimate new integrated sustainability actions:

“That's why I say about the whole legitimizing piece that, ‘Oh our competitors did it. Oh okay, so let's look at what they did. Now, how can we tweak it to make it better for us?’ [...] So, although we may have led the charge with sustainability as a whole in terms of other programs, we had to look elsewhere first” (Global Human Resources Manager).
Finally, supporting brainstorming and asking probing questions helped get employees to look beyond the current way they work to see new ways of approaching it: “I'm just saying there's got to be a better way and let's challenge that way […] It's all about the risk associated with going somewhere different and the comfort factor of, ‘What we're doing today works and fits all of these requirements, price, cost, environment, and all of these other things already. Why am I going to change that?’” (Change Agent).

‘Detail and procedural orientation’ appeared to have a constraining effect on employees’ efforts to integrate sustainability into their work by limiting employees’ creativity and by making it difficult and more time-consuming to implement any new actions in the workplace, as captured by a Site Supply Chain Analyst:

“There's a lot of red tape and it's a lot of bureaucracy and there are a lot of levels of approval for everything. I understand that these things are necessary like all the audits and whatever. Everyone's got to cover themselves, but it's not a culture that's conducive to creativity and different ways of doing things.”

A Change Agent similarly described this effect: “Everyone wants to put their stamp or their two cents in and make sure that it's the right thing for company and all of these things. Everyone has great intentions, but that whole process takes a long time.”

Tailored support work helped dampen this constraining effect. For instance, the fact that the Change Agents who organized the working groups provided data and insights about other sites' integrated sustainability actions and brokered connections made it much easier for others to overcome the difficult procedural hurdles to implementation: “It's been a tremendous help having a bigger team around us. If I was to do this, if we were a standalone organization, in which maybe a couple of dozen worked here, and trying to do that yourself, trying to bring in the information management systems, trying to bring
in the risk assessment templates, that sort of thing will be far, far more difficult” (Site Facilities Manager).

‘Drinking from the firehose’ appeared to constrain integrated sustainability actions by making employees hesitant to commit time to planning and undertaking new sustainability-related actions within their roles. Reflecting on how ManufactureCo’s culture might constrain sustainability initiatives at the company, a Site Supply Chain Analyst noted that “most people are extremely busy. We’ve been downsized and downsized and take on secondary roles and take on half of somebody else’s roles. People don’t have a lot of time to be doing extra side projects […] It's just not part of... It doesn’t meld easily with ManufactureCo’s culture.” Another Site Supply Chain Analyst echoed the idea that employees were too over-stretched to be able to engage in new actions: “[There] just isn’t time. We don’t have enough people. It sucks, I'm sorry I’m not giving you awesome answers but we’re really overworked and understaffed.” Tailored support work made the entire process of ideating and implementing new integrated sustainability actions easier for employees, dampening the effect of ‘drinking from the firehose’. A Business Development Manager and I had this exchange about the importance of tailored support work which exemplified this effect:

“Business Development Manager: So if the customer was interested and we didn't have [a Change Agent] as a resource, then yeah, we wouldn't be able to do it. There are not enough hours in the day for us to be able to take that task on as well.

Researcher: Is it also the detail that your team has the skills to do it or would you need to develop those skills as well?

Business Development Manager: No, I think we could figure it out, carbon footprint calculations and applications for various awards and accolades, it's not beyond our capability. It's just literally there are not enough hours in the day.”
Finally, ‘thrifty’ appeared to constrain employees’ integration of sustainability into their core work by making employees reluctant to engage in new integrated sustainability actions if they felt they might incur a cost or capital outlay. A Site Supply Chain Manager reflected on how employees’ concerns with thriftiness could prevent them from even making suggestions or putting forward ideas:

“People think that it's going to cost a lot of money, then they may not put an idea forward because of that culture. I still tell everybody to keep putting their idea forward. The worst somebody can do is say no, but they can't say no until you... you can't give them the opportunity to say no if you don't tell them what your idea is. Yes, people think that if it costs money then nobody is going to do it. That might be a hindrance.”

A Global Human Resources Manager similarly described how her experiences made her perceive that getting approval for financial expenditures was very difficult, possibly resulting in employees expecting that their ideas wouldn’t be approved:

“Even though we may have a cost saving, even though there is a benefit, if they don't see a benefit whether it's that we didn't talk about it well enough or present it well enough [...] For the most part, if it said no then it will be no and we're not going to go forward with it [...] How would that affect other people, it could be a perception of well, Finance says no. We think that they'll say no. For us, it's been that way.”

Tailored support work helped dampen this effect in several ways. For instance, supporting brainstorming helped employees identify the most cost-effective forms of integrated sustainability actions. Providing change agency support supported employees in pushing through business cases for integrated sustainability actions that involved a capital outlay:

“Sometimes a business decision can be... in trying to make the business case to make an investment in something that's going to reduce cost and improve quality, and sometimes the case is a slam dunk. It's like, hey, we'll make this investment, and it's a twelve-month payback, and it's pretty easy to make the justification. Other cases, maybe it's a lower internal rate of return, or a longer payback, and it's harder to make the justification for the investment or the change
in business process. In those cases, sometimes sustainability can tip the scales. That one way support of someone like [a Change Agent] is helpful” (Sales Engineering Analyst).

The Change Agents were implicitly aware of the importance of dampening to gain traction. For instance, one Change Agent was aware of the importance of dampening the potential constraining effect of ‘failure aversion’: “I find that people are just willing to put ideas forward and pitch ideas and when we make a safe space, not to co-opt the term, but we're effectively making a safe space for people to ideate in, right, and allowing them to draw out ideas. If it goes nowhere, that's fine.”

**Cultural reinforcement.** As in the cultural elevation pathway, when employees experience success in engaging in integrated actions, it reinforces the integration of a focal meaning in a process of *cultural reinforcement*, which is represented by the bottom-most arrow in the middle of Figure 2. ManufactureCo employees discussed how their engagement in integrated sustainability actions reinforced the integration of 'sustainability' with other meanings. For instance, a Business Development Manager reflected that his team's integration of sustainability into the value proposition for a customer made him see sustainability as even more valuable as a means of meeting customer needs: “As the [Business Development Team], we probably need to do more work on this, become more aware of our impact. This is where we're now working with [a Change Agent] more on trying to pull out the key value adds of ManufactureCo from a sustainability point of view.” A Site Facilities Manager, who over time increased his efforts to reduce the environmental footprint of his work, reflected on how he also came to see a connection between ‘sustainability’ and ‘customer orientation’:

“I actually think there's a commercial advantage as well. One of the main drivers behind this for ManufactureCo, it is cost reduction, absolutely, but another side to
it, it's a differentiator in the marketplace. We have a lot of competitors who do exactly what we do. They manufacture for other people. If we can provide potential customers with an environmental, sustainable aspect for that, a lot of them are asking for that now.”

Employees also discussed how they subsequently engaged in, or wanted to engage in, other integrated sustainability actions. For example, a Site Supply Chain Manager had been working on a project to replace non-recyclable anti-static bags used in many of ManufactureCo’s products. As the project moved closer to being implemented, she reflected that she had begun thinking about replacing other materials: “It opens up new possibilities, yes. I started thinking, okay well, they not only can replace these [anti-static] bags, but maybe we can do something about our packaging. Can they offer a possible solution for some additional or different packaging? I've gone back to them with a design for some other products that we make.” Similarly, at one of the international sites, a Site Engineering Director had begun implementing new Internet of Things [IoT] controls to reduce energy use throughout the factory. He reflected that he began seeing different ways the tool could be used to save even more energy in the future: “I think people then want to do more controls and have more projects around this that can have more energy savings [...] This is my ultimate goal. We call it the dark factory. People don’t have to turn off lights or on lights. The IoT would control everything. This is our goal.” The Change Agent whose metaphor of learning to hit a nail with a hammer captured the importance of tailored support work also used the metaphor to describe how, once employees learn to engage in sustainability actions, they may give rise to other actions:

“It's this iterative loop, right? First time you pick up a hammer, you're constantly missing the nail. People think that hammers should be pushed, or they can't connect their eye to it and they're moving their elbow around all the time and
they're missing the nail, but the more times you pick up the hammer, the more proficient you become with the hammer, to the point where, in a week, you can pound that nail in with one hit, right? Whereas before it took you 30, right?"

In certain pockets of the organization, my analysis suggests that, through its integration with other meanings, ‘sustainability’ appeared to become a lens through which employees began revisiting their work on a regular basis. For example, in describing a recent initiative undertaken by his team, a Vice President of Global Operations’ comments exemplified how ‘sustainability’ was beginning to take hold as a lens through which his employees were beginning to revisit a large part of their work to improve their sustainability performance while also meeting their other goals:

“It actually came from sustainability versus cost reduction. You’re right, we could have had the same thought from a cost reduction point of view that we can reduce our cost by looking at dimensional weight, but it came from more of this. One of the things we just looked at, we double palleted, we’ve just moved production of [a] project from [Headquarters] to [an international site]. Now instead of bringing all of the small parts in individually, we’re now bringing in a nearly assembled unit once. Again, from a costing point of view, yeah it gives us an improvement, but it also reduces our carbon footprint because every supplier was delivering the material to [Headquarters], now we only have 1 supplier delivering the material. From a dimensional weight point of view and a cost point of view, we’ve reduced our cost but we’ve also saved a huge amount of carbon footprint. These things are beginning to take hold.”

Similarly, within a Sales team, ‘sustainability’ appeared to become a tool for the team to differentiate itself from others and providing business and sustainability value in tandem:

“The incredible thing I’ve noticed is the frequency with which the sales and solutions people bring up sustainability as a tactic [...] we’ve looked at their business and we’ve said they are spending way too much on freight. There’s an opportunity here. But rather than walk in and say, you’re spending too much on freight, we walked in and said, we think we have a carbon footprint reduction opportunity that is also a valuable business opportunity. Our analysis of your carbon footprint shows you that you have the opportunity to place a location in the East. So we talked about it as carbon” (Change Agent).

**Summary of the cultural integration pathway.** As change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work such as reframing employees’ work around the focal
meaning, the focal meaning becomes integrated into other meanings, equipping employees to engage in integrated actions. Tailored support work undertaken by change agents such as supporting brainstorming and providing fire cover facilitates employees’ engagement in integrated actions through its enabling effect and its dampening effects. As employees successfully engage in integrated actions, the integration of a focal meaning becomes further reinforced, in turn, equipping employees to engage in more integrated actions through a process of cultural reinforcement.

4.5 Contrasting and Integrating the Outcomes of the Two Pathways at ManufactureCo

As I describe below, the two pathways capture different outcomes that are driven by access to different forms of cultural change work. Yet, both pathways can also support and reinforce each other.

Contrasting the outcomes of both pathways. Despite the elevation of ‘sustainability’, for most employees throughout the organization that weren’t represented in the cultural integration pathway, ‘sustainability’ remained largely a standalone meaning that remained independent from other meanings such as ‘thrifty’ and ‘innovation in a box’: “People don’t really feel like it’s something actively involved in the culture” (Site Supply Chain Manager). ‘Sustainability’ wasn’t perceived as integrated with traditional “business” concerns like earning revenue and optimizing production: “I think, ‘cuz a lot of people focus on business they don’t really think sustainability is involved in that. You know, they think work work, we make money we make stuff, and it’s like an afterthought” (Site Operations Support Analyst). In some cases, it was connected to other meanings in a theoretical and conceptual way, for instance with
employees seeing a theoretical connection between sustainability and customer satisfaction, but not in a concrete manner at the level of employees’ daily work.

Many of these employees also didn’t perceive sustainability as something related to their work. For instance, when asked in what ways she saw sustainability as related to her work, a Contracting Manager responded that she “can’t think of anything”, later elaborating that:

“I absolutely want to promote ManufactureCo to be an ethical, sustainable company. And I think it can be a positive role model for everyone. But I feel that from the people perspective, it’s just something that: ‘Oh, great. It’s great that corporate is talking about this’… and then move on and do their work’. That’s my perspective.”

These employees also didn’t interpret sustainability as actionable: “Just no clue. Where would I begin? I would love to do something… [reading Green Future Intranet stories] makes me glad that others do things, but I don’t know where to begin beyond recycling and turning off lights” (Site Supply Chain Analyst).

Similarly, despite their increasing engagement in peripheral sustainability actions such as recycling, most employees throughout ManufactureCo weren’t engaging in integrated sustainability actions. One Site Human Resources Manager, for instance, observed that she didn’t see her teammates integrating sustainability into their work: “I don’t think so. I certainly don’t see it […] if someone takes a horn and says hey, listen. We’re going to go, we’d like to do a volunteer event.” A Site Operations Support Analyst echoed this sentiment: “Hmmm yeah. Well If I look directly at my job, I mean outside of me just trying to recycle papers and turn the lights off and all that stuff, in our actual work… I guess it comes in terms of, hmm. Yeah, I don’t know.” Many employees expressed a desire to engage in integrated sustainability actions, as represented by the
Quotation motivating my dissertation in which an employee wanted to move beyond peripheral actions to integrating sustainability into his core work. Yet despite relatively few people engaging in integrated sustainability actions, some employees did nonetheless see it as something that could be possible. For instance, in a member check-in later in the research process, a Site Supply Chain Analyst further reflected that she saw this potential:

“I would like to think it's a bottomless pit of possibilities. I would like to think that there's always things that could be integrated or improved or tweaked in some way to create improvements [...] I think the challenge is that it's not in people’s minds, or it is but like you said more in a peripheral way. It's like: I can recycle and I can turn the lights off when I leave the meeting room. I think people are pretty good about that kind of stuff, but as far as our core jobs, it’s hard to know how analyzing the spreadsheets that I've been analyzing for 3 weeks could in any way be done more sustainably.”

A Site Supply Chain Manager echoed this sentiment in a member check-in:

“[My work] is all on a computer. It's all systems-based. To try to translate that into sustainability, I struggle with the fact that there’s no material usage. There’s no physical material directly in that process, other than the actual production material that we're planning and using in the site [...] The focus there is always on the dollars that are invested in inventory, and it's not really couched in a sustainability context, but it certainly could be. I need to think about how I can maybe promote that angle a little bit more.”

In my analysis, I found that an important reason underpinning these differences in the integration of ‘sustainability’ and in employees’ engagement in sustainability-related actions was access to different forms of direct cultural change work. Most employees throughout the organization had access to broad meaning-making work and broad support work, while only pockets of the organization had access to tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work. Tailored meaning-making work created tangible, grounded, and specific connections between employees’ work and the focal meaning. In contrast, because of its abstract and general nature, broad meaning-
making work wasn’t effective at shaping the interpretation that sustainability was actionable and related to employees’ work, limiting the potential for ‘sustainability’ to be integrated with other meanings. For instance, while the calls to action were seen by many as evocative, they weren’t successful at relating sustainability to people’s work:

“When Green Future was first rolled out there was a video presentation about the [pallet washing initiative] that they implemented […] they put that up, made the employees aware that there had been this initiative, but there wasn’t really any direction on how you could, you know, initiate other things on your own” (Site Supply Chain Manager).

A Site Operations Support Analyst echoed this sentiment regarding the stories and educational events: “They have […] the promotions on the sustainability website […] [and] the idea that our [annual spirit day] was going to be more around sustainability and up-cycle and environmental… but I think once you go back to your day-to-day work, I don't know how much of that is still in the back of your mind.”

Similarly, the supportive infrastructure created by broad support work wasn’t explicitly focused on employees’ core work and expertise, although the Change Agents did begin to encourage employees to use the infrastructure to focus on their core work towards the end of the study period based partially on my feedback. It was also largely impersonal, with direct interactions with the Change Agents limited to some users of the infrastructure (e.g. employees suggesting ideas in the IdeaGenerationTool). This limited its ability to help employees engage in integrated sustainability actions. Employees without access to tailored support work perceived this as a limitation:

“I don't feel that the central team is going out and saying, ‘What is it that you do? How can we introduce sustainability to it? Have you thought of doing this and this and this?’ Maybe they’re doing that elsewhere […] but it hasn't reached me if that is happening” (Site Supply Chain Manager).
Notably, in discussing factors they thought might help them in integrating sustainability into their work, employees noted how having somebody help link their work to sustainability and provide sample actionable items could be a big enabler. A Contracting Manager reflected: “I would [have someone] do more ambassador kinds of things […] they would challenge people to think about what you can do today to be different… what should you stop doing, and continue doing, and something new you should be doing.” A Site Operations Analyst similarly reflected that “people need to be somewhat guided […] someone needs to be able to say, ‘This is how we can do it. This is how you can do it.’” In a member check-in with one of the Change Agents, she reflected that she felt that lack of exposure to tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work could explain the different types of change captured through the two pathways:

“I think we are in violent agreement on this by the way. I truly feel like nobody is making that journey from what I would call these peripheral actions or engagement actions just on their own. We need more… I think we honestly need more people to do almost hand holding or provocative kaizen events of how might we do this, and how might we… so it might take us doing more road trips, doing more factory walks… I wholeheartedly agree.”

Comparing the outcomes of the two pathways at ManufactureCo suggests that access to particular forms of cultural change work (tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work) helps explain whether employees will experience either cultural elevation or cultural integration, and increases in peripheral actions or increases in integrated actions. Another possible explanation could be that cultural integration was only possible in some departments that had a more obvious and direct connection with sustainability (and that, as a result, the Change Agents engaged in tailored meaning-making and tailored support work with those departments). In fact, the Change Agents
also engaged in tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work with departments that did not have an obvious linkage to sustainability, including Human Resources and Global Purchasing (described in Section 4.4) and, more recently, a Finance team. In these departments, ‘sustainability’ increasingly became integrated into other meanings, and employees began to implement, or consider implementing, integrated sustainability actions. This supports the notion that access to tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work appeared to be a differentiating factor in the outcomes.

Interplay between the two pathways. While I depict the cultural elevation and cultural integration pathways as distinct, they do have the potential to reinforce each other. Cultural elevation helps facilitate cultural integration. As ‘sustainability’ became elevated throughout ManufactureCo, it became easier to integrate it with other meanings. In one of my member check-ins in which I asked two Change Agents about the linkages between the two pathways, one of the Change Agents described it this way:

“Without elevation through the company, you can't then attach it to customer orientation, which means, and […] so you can't go in and change the behaviour. […] So I see these as phases. […] You need to carpet-bomb, first phase […] Then you leverage that cultural elevation to then start finding people who can make the next step towards cultural integration. Then you can reframe sustainability into another cultural message.”

Another Change Agent explained how greater elevation can increase the visibility and perceived value of ‘sustainability’: “If it were more elevated, now there’s a value proposition for an employee, and then the more it's out there, the more visible it is.”
Cultural integration can also help change agents engage in the cultural elevation pathway by providing them with stories and examples with which to undertake their broad meaning-making work. As change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work, they identify stories and examples that they can then incorporate into their broad meaning-making work. One of the Change Agents described it this way: “So, [the cultural elevation pathway] started to bring it closer. A couple of stories that came through [the cultural integration pathway] started to bring it even closer. Then […] from [the cultural integration pathway] it went into the storytelling of [the cultural elevation pathway], which then creates this iterative loop.”

4.6 Indirect Cultural Change Work

While meaning-making work and support work can have a direct role in engendering changes in meanings and actions as described in Section 4.3 and Section 4.4, change agents can also engage in indirect cultural change work, which, drawing on Bertels and colleagues’ (2014) conceptualization of indirect institutional work, I define as effortful actions undertaken by individuals to develop and improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work more effectively. My analysis suggests a bidirectional link between direct cultural change work and indirect cultural change work: indirect cultural change work can support change agents’ direct cultural change work, which can in turn help change agents engage in indirect cultural change work. Specifically, indirect cultural change work can support change agents’ direct cultural change work by increasing their access to resources, increasing their symbolic power, increasing their access to interactions, and increasing the applicability of their direct cultural change work. Direct cultural change work in turn can support change agents’
indirect cultural change work by *providing them with the resources with which to craft their indirect cultural change work*. In my analysis of the work of the Change Agents, I identified three overarching forms of indirect cultural change work: *preparatory work*, *relational work*, and *change agent legitimacy-gaining work*. In the next three subsections, I describe each of these forms of work to then elaborate on the mechanisms through which they support direct cultural change work. I then discuss how direct cultural change work can, in turn, support indirect cultural change work. Figure 3 illustrates these relationships, with the arrows representing mechanisms through which a form of work supports another form of work.

--- Insert Figure 3 about here ---

**Preparatory work.** Change agents can build their capacity to undertake direct cultural change work through rigorous preparation. Preparatory work refers to individual cognitive work aimed at constructing cultural change interactions. I observed that the Change Agents engaged in three forms of preparatory work: *building underlying knowledge*, *planning work*, and *reflective work*.

**Building underlying knowledge.** Building underlying knowledge refers to efforts to develop an understanding of the knowledge and skills that underpin the focal meaning of a cultural change initiative and how the focal meaning relates to the business and the motivations, goals, work processes, and stakeholders of the change recipients. In terms of broader learning, the Change Agents regularly learned about ManufactureCo’s customers, its processes and business practices, and potential linkages with sustainability. For example, a Change Agent regularly monitored ManufactureCo's customers: “I am monitoring about, I guess about 20 of our top customers and I am
monitoring their initiatives. Sustainability is strongly linked to brand. The other thing that I am monitoring is customer scorecards. So, how our customers are ranking us compared to our competition.” In terms of more specific learning about change recipients, the Change Agents learned about the change recipients’ priorities and motivators, their specific business processes, and specific ways in which sustainability might relate to their work. As examples of instances in which the Change Agents learned about specific linkages between sustainability and certain work groups, a Change Agent focused on learning as much as he could about specific sites’ waste management practices: “I think the main focus would be to get to know their waste in general… so I might spend a couple of days with the suppliers as well because I agree that it is the best way to know the process” (Change Agent). Another Change Agent focused on gaining an in-depth understanding the causes of retention-related problems across the organization’s network:

“What I found going there was there was a lot more information about why people are choosing to leave which helped us build solutions around retention, around what can we do differently? It wasn’t just about overtime and how can we solve it. It was about people are leaving and how can we keep them? […] I would say I learned a lot about the cultural issues that people are experiencing I guess or the perceptions that employees have when they first start working for ManufactureCo.”

Finally, the Change Agents regularly focused on improving their technical knowledge and skills related to Green Future. One of the Change Agents, for instance, took a short course on lean to be able to better understand the concept and its connection with sustainability. Another spent considerable time learning about emissions: “From February to the end of April, I was entirely consumed with emissions. Learning some of it, getting the report ready, and getting the data and having it verified” (Change Agent).
Planning work. Change agents can also engage in planning work, which I define as constructing and developing concepts, communications, and materials to support change agents when undertaking their cultural change work. The Change Agents devoted a lot of time to this form of work. As an example of developing a solution and developing a communication plan, in my observations I observed a Change Agent borrow an IR camera and walk around the factory floor by herself to look for areas in which energy might be wasted in order to have material and suggestions available to present to sites as part of her tailored meaning-making work. A Sales Director with whom a Change Agent had worked reflected on the tools the Change Agent created to support their carbon calculations: “[A Change Agent] has developed new models do this even faster. Still all on Excel but making it better and better.” In terms of individual brainstorming, an important way of brainstorming ideas was to critically reflect on previous organizational initiatives and review them through the lens of sustainability in order to identify innovative new ideas. As an example of this, a Change Agent manually went through a large stack of continuous improvement forms at his desk, identifying any that had an unnoticed and unintentional sustainability benefit (field notes, interviews). This Change Agent then used findings from this analysis in some of his interactions with employees. Another Change Agent was planning on working with employees in a Finance team, and spent time in her office brainstorming potential linkages between their work and sustainability (field notes). Finally, in my day-to-day interactions with the Change Agents, I regularly saw them working on presentations that they would use in their interactions:

“This morning, as yesterday afternoon, [a Change Agent] was working on a slide deck for the [a Sales team] for a potential customer. The slide deck was a sleek
one, showing graphical changes in total weight and GHG emissions for different scenarios, maps trying to show what current / future processes could look like, and a slide that shows the carbon emissions in various formats like cars and trees” (field notes).

**Reflective work.** Finally, change agents can engage in reflective work, which refers to exploring and reconsidering prior cultural change work to extract personal learnings. One Change Agent, who traveled to several ManufactureCo sites throughout the study period, often reflected on his cultural change work experiences. After his first on-the-ground interactions at one of the international sites, this Change Agent reflected on what worked well and what could be improved in subsequent interactions with other sites. He found that his interactions at this site were partially hindered because his original pitch about the financial value of increased waste segregation was higher than the reality on the ground due to different terminology around classes of waste.

Reflecting on a later interaction at another site, he stated: “I was definitely more prepared because of the terminology of the waste.” He similarly learned about the importance of gaining the explicit support from senior leaders after he saw the benefits he gained by doing so in his initial interactions at the first international site. Another Change Agent often reflected on how she could better channel her creativity in ways that would be seen as more appropriate within ManufactureCo:

“I have learned how to focus my creativity and focus my ideation in a very channeled direction that adds value to the business. So if there is a skill that I have worked on over the years it is really channeling my creative outlet more than anything. If I look back at major sources of frustration in my early career, those major sources of frustration are related to having an amazing idea that is completely misplaced, and doesn't make sense in the four walls of ManufactureCo.”

**The effect of preparatory work on direct cultural change work.** My analysis suggests one overarching way in which change agents’ engagement in preparatory
work can support their direct cultural change work: by *improving the applicability* of their
direct cultural change work. Direct cultural change work that is more applicable and has
a better fit with a given context and interaction is more likely to be effective at shaping
interpretations of a focal meaning and increasing engagement in actions related to a
focal meaning. Learning about the specific circumstances of a work group, for instance,
helped a Change Agent engage in more relevant and value-adding integrated support
work with Site Facilities employees at one of the sites:

“There's fundamental changes that have to happen, but that has to happen with
the customer. It's not just something that we can say, 'Yeah, let's reduce this,' or
'How are we going to reduce our compressed air or our energy?' [...] It's either
complete shutdown or on. There's no in between. While you're in there, it gives
you that perspective. Now I know I have to arm that Facilities person with the
information that he can go back and make... It's all about these people that we're
working with” (Change Agent).

Learning about different change recipients' working styles and strengths similarly helped
a Change Agent ensure that she could tailor her interaction to achieve a desirable
outcome:

“A guy like [an employee], what I need to bring to him is I need to bring him ideas
so that he can find people because he's a people connector [...] A guy like
[another employee], he is like an off the charts creator. I will never have to bring
him an idea. What I need to bring [him] is direction” (Change Agent).

As another example, planning work helped ensure that the Change Agents’ tailored
meaning-making work was more applicable to a department’s processes and products,
as described by a Change Agent who had reframed a Sales team’s work around
sustainability:

“What I had done is that I did a lifecycle assessment to prove that even when you
factor in reverse logistics and when you factor in energy, materials, all of that, to
repair a product, I was able to roughly show that it was a significant savings of
carbon versus building a new one. By doing that kind of assessment and
showing that lifecycle approach and showing there was a significant carbon
offset, that made people feel good about reverse logistics, whereas it hasn’t always been a sexy business.”

**Summary.** Change agents can engage in various forms of preparatory work to construct their interactions. I identified thee forms of preparatory work in my analysis of the work of the Change Agents: building underlying knowledge, planning work, and reflective work. Preparatory work can support change agents’ direct cultural change work primarily by increasing its applicability.

**Relational work.** In addition to efforts to rigorously prepare for their interactions, change agents can work on developing relevant relationships through relational work. Relational work refers to efforts to cultivate and develop relationships internally and externally that are relevant to the cultural change initiative. The Change Agents engaged in relational work both internally throughout ManufactureCo and outside of the organization’s boundaries. As examples of internal relational work, the Change Agents regularly used company functions to meet new people, particularly individuals with whom they would like to interact with more directly in the future (field notes). The Change Agents also tried to arrange face-to-face meetings as much as possible in order to get to know new people throughout the organization. A Change Agent reflected on how she used such a visit to meet as many people as possible: “I proceeded to establish relationships by meeting with people. I went to [an international site] in my first year of working on this role as well and I just did totally the face-to-face relationship building.” As an example of external relational work, one of the Change Agents networked with a local electrical utility to discuss potential sustainability collaborations:

“When [a municipal electrical authority] came in, I was talking about the idea of changing our corporate giving to be more a focus like this, and then we rapped off a couple of ideas, like [using our products] for community housing in [the
Headquarters city], [using our products] for parks for lights at night, [using our products] for a community center in [a developing country]” (Change Agent).

This same Change Agent also built relationships with individuals from other industries in the field with the goal of creating a symposium around packaging waste: “One of the biggest wastes in our business is package waste. And to me if it is a waste from a carbon footprint from freight, the sheer amount of stuff we burn through […] I can create an informal symposium or consortium where we actually tackle this” (Change Agent).

_The effect of relational work on direct cultural change work._ My analysis suggests that change agents’ engagement in relational work can support their direct cultural change work in two ways: _increasing access to interactions_, and _increasing access to resources_.

Increasing access to interactions. First, engaging in relational work can help increase access to first-time interactions with a broader range of employees and subsequent interactions with employees with whom change agents have existing relationships. One Change Agent reflected on how internal relational work with a former colleague helped open doors to interactions with that colleague’s team:

“We had lunch and I was telling him about a project I am working on and what I was trying to do, and he was telling me about his project and we put two and two together and saw that this would be a real kind of match made in heaven, that we can really help each other out. He saw that I have a soapbox, and he has soap. That is what really got me in the door, and it’s been catching on like wildfire since we talked about that.”

Another Change Agent found that engaging in relational work made people more likely to want to meet with him in person: “Culturally, it is the only way to get something done. The word I'm going to use is permission. It's not permission, but it's the... They don’t
really know who I am. They've never met me. All I am is a voice on the phone. They can't put a face to it.”

Increasing access to resources. Second, engaging in relational work can help increase access to resources, which include data and information relevant to change agents' work. For instance, one of the Change Agents received important information and technical insights from employees at two customers with whom she had developed strong relationships. In one instance, these contacts pointed her to an important concept that she later incorporated into her work with Site Operations teams: “Out of that information, one of the things I came across was what was happening in other industries? And my counterparts in [a customer] and [a customer] pointed me to the idea of power usage effectiveness” (Change Agent). In another case, this Change Agent helped a customer contact with sustainability reporting. This led to the customer contact not only sharing an innovative way of interpreting the data, but also made him want to pay an in-person visit to ManufactureCo during which the Change Agent planned to introduce him to ManufactureCo employees:

“One [contact] from [the customer] actually came up with a great way of interpreting the results into an Excel. We copied that from them, and now the guy from [the customer] is taking a day out of a trip to come and visit us on Friday. I'm gonna bring him in to talk to the Design team about integrating sustainability into design” (Change Agent).

Summary. Change agents can engage in relational work to develop and cultivate internal and external relationships relevant to the cultural change initiative. As change agents develop relationships, they can support their direct cultural change work through increasing access to interactions and increasing access to resources.
Change agent legitimacy-gaining work. Drawing on Suchman’s (1995) definition of legitimacy, I define change agent legitimacy-gaining work as work undertaken by change agents to increase others’ perception that they and their actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate. At ManufactureCo, the lead Change Agent was generally regarded as a highly legitimate figure within the organization, particularly among senior leaders: “I’ve got a lot of history and a lot of credibility with the senior management team” (Change Agent). In contrast, the four other Change Agents had less legitimacy to draw upon in trying to undertake their direct cultural change work. One Change Agent, for instance, reflected that she didn’t have enough credibility to be put onto a senior leader’s calendar: “Some of the senior leaders know my name and they know what I’m able to do, but I can’t just insert myself into their agendas. I would have to negotiate, I would have to cajole, I would have to beg and plead.” This Change Agent further argued that her role is different from the dominant roles seen as legitimate in the organization:

“I’m not relatable to a vast majority of our population. Given the different types of jobs, I’m that corporate guy who’s asking them to do something. If that guy who is wearing the smock, doing the same job in a different country, the guy out on the floor, he can inspire more people than I can because more people in our company look like him and more people in our company, their day-to-day job is like that.”

In my analysis of the work of the Change Agents, I identified five forms of change agent legitimacy-gaining work: gathering proof points, elevating the work of others, walking the walk, aligning with salient meanings, and demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge. I describe these below.

Gathering proof points. Gathering proof points refers to identifying and documenting instances in which a cultural change initiative helped achieve desired
outcomes. These proof points can originate both internally and externally to an organization. In terms of proof points originating internally, in one instance, a Change Agent was working with a Site Facilities team to increase the revenue the site generates from undertaking more refined waste segregation. While a major impetus for being at the site was to help them increase waste segregation, the Change Agent also saw it as an opportunity to gather evidence that Green Future can help with other outcomes, in this case revenue generation: “It’s not that [the lead Change Agent] wants to… he just wants to claim that he helped you get that $1.3 million nothing more than that” (Change Agent). A Green Future Intern explained why demonstrating this contribution to other goals is important: “It definitely helps with senior management at least […] there’s a wider business case that they appreciate. I think it works well, especially with a lot of the engagement initiatives that happen and with the sustainability name on it. It helps that as well.” Early on when she was working with a Sales team to integrate sustainability into their functions, another Change Agent was focused on gathering proof points in which sustainability was shown to help win new business. She described the anticipated benefits this way: “If we win that one, that'll be a huge proof point for sustainability being a key decision maker in, a key element in a win and once we have the big win like that, people will be knocking on the door more and more to get this information” (Change Agent).

The Change Agents also gathered and documented proof points that originated externally, which primarily included instances in which external audiences – including sustainability rating organizations, the media, and customers – approved of their work. For instance, during my fieldwork, ManufactureCo was recognized for its sustainability
performance and earned high rankings from several notable organizations, helping the
Change Agents increase their level of perceived legitimacy:

“I think two things that have really generated a lot of activity and a lot of engagement and buy-in especially at the executive level, is the fact that we [got high rankings and recognition from two organizations]. Those, in and of themselves, don’t really mean anything, but I think that external recognition got a lot of executives kind of excited, and it got their attention, so that was I think really and I didn’t really foresee that happening so quickly, because I think we are pretty early on in our journey. Although I think we’ve made a lot of progress in a short amount of time. I think that, and I certainly wasn’t anticipating getting that kind of recognition so early on the journey, but it has served to really get people’s attention, especially when they look at the list and they see a lot of our top customers on the list, as well. I think it really got a lot of people’s attention, and just reinforced that what we’re doing is the right thing, and it means something. Those are two things that I really hadn’t thought were going to happen that early on” (Change Agent).

The Change Agents also gained more specific external recognition for some of ManufactureCo’s improvements and innovations around sustainability, as described by a Change Agent in a meeting with me: “We are starting to be recognized as the thought leader […] like lead-free manufacturing where we have more awards and papers, then in the [major industry sustainability council] we are writing reports on working hours. There are really lots of examples of this” (field notes).

*Elevating the work of others.* Elevating the work of others refers to fostering the perception that other employees are making a positive contribution to the goals of a cultural change initiative. In a general sense, the Change Agents avoided placing too much of a direct focus on themselves, striving to be humble. A Contracting Manager reflected that “if they say they’re going to do something, they do it. They’re not pompous about it. They don’t brag. They just quietly do what they need to do […] They’re like cowboys.” They instead often promoted others’ initiatives and the positive effects they
had. For instance, one of the Change Agents used an award acceptance speech to publicize the contributions of all the employees involved in the initiative:

“I mentioned every single person and I spoke in their voices and thanked their leaders. I made it a really signalling opportunity. I talked about [the customer] and the account and the leadership shown to let the team have the latitude to add sustainability to strategy. So I kind of talked up the leaders from the voice of the team […] I wanted to talk up the team and their leadership as it’s a signalling opportunity to show that our customers care about sustainability […] It helped me connect in to some of their team and showed that I work with their team, and its kind of like if I’m trusted in this [high-value] account, maybe I should trust her too, right? And if [ManufactureCo customer-facing team] invited her into the factory and has her installing these sensors all over the place… well I trust her, and she trusts her, so maybe I should give her some time of day” (Change Agent).

A Site Engineering Director that the Change Agent mentioned was highly appreciative of this positioning, describing how not all corporate change agents at ManufactureCo behave this way:

“[The Change Agent] is also a good promotion to our team. We found that we opened this to her, she is very interested. And the result comes back that she talked to her boss, and we feel that we did really well, which is then really aligned to what our boss does, so that means that [the Change Agent] has talked to other bosses to make that connection. So it helps us a lot in our team. No other corporate [employees] do this… they give us the way and we are experts so you have to do this. And with [this Change Agent] it was different.”

Walking the walk. Walking the walk refers to efforts to work and act in a manner that aligns with the espoused goal of a cultural change initiative. All Change Agents always strove to act sustainably by, for example, participating in the online community, turning off their lights, turning off lights in rooms that weren’t being used, and recycling their waste (field notes). A Site Operations Support Analyst discussed how these actions gave her the impression that they truly believed in Green Future and sustainability: “You really see that they just don’t do it here because I’m paid to do this […] It’s actually like I want to do this. I enjoy doing this.” A Global Human Resources
Manager shared a similar perception: “I'm watching them and they're practicing what they're saying, I'm going to believe them. I'm going to trust them. Whereas if someone came to me who is constantly printing up stacks and stacks of paper and says, ‘You really need to be green and cut down on your paper usage’, I'm not going to trust them as much.”

**Aligning with salient meanings.** Aligning with salient meanings refers to acting and communicating in a way that is aligned with the meanings that are salient in a particular context. For instance, recognizing the strong 'customer orientation' throughout the organization, the Change Agents often framed ideas in terms of their resonance to providing customer value:

“A year ago, we would have said ‘who is responsible for [anti-static] bags? Hey, there’s this environmental solution that does this and this… Who is responsible for [anti-static] bags?’ Whereas what we said now was that we want to use these guys, get them on our preferred supplier list because customers want these bags” (Change Agent).

Recognizing the salience of the 'procedural and detail orientation', when a Change Agent was preparing to communicate with a member of a Sales team about customers' interest in sustainability, she emphasized the importance of providing rigorous data to support her claims when interacting with one of the leaders: “Until I prove it to him, it's not going to be hand waving with him, it's going to be cold, hard data. That's how I'm going to have to change my game with him” (Change Agent). As a final example, given the strong 'failure aversion' at ManufactureCo, the Change Agents often piloted small versions of actions to show that they had been successful, as in the case of a Change Agent who was helping roll out a program to eliminate individual garbage cans at employees' desks: “You'd have to say that you did a pilot project in an area, it was
successful, here are the benefits that they came out of it.” Another approach was pointing to other organizations that had successfully implemented a similar action (field notes).

_Demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge_. Finally, demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge refers to demonstrating that one has the skills and knowledge that are valued by a particular audience. The Change Agents often did this subtly and through their work. For instance, one of the Change Agents conveyed her knowledge of equipment and machinery on the factory floor when she was working with a Site Operations team on energy literacy projects:

“The way you talk and you hold yourself sometimes has a huge impact on the way people perceive what you say. And I don’t know what it was but those guys… I didn’t bring a resume […] but as I was walking on the factory I was able to identify all of the equipment because I knew it. It makes them more comfortable. They are used to people from corporate coming in and bossing them around” (Change Agent).

In other instances, when the Change Agents felt that others didn’t perceive that they had valued expertise and skills, they verbalized their knowledge to manage this impression. For instance, one of the Change Agents perceived that some Site Operations employees didn’t see her as somebody with adequate technical experience to understand their concerns. She dealt with this situation by conveying that she has a strong understanding of operations processes at ManufactureCo:

“When I get somebody across the table saying, ‘You just don’t understand’, those words haven’t been used, but I know some people think that way. Going face to face is how I feel I turn some people around. Sitting across from people being able to say, ‘I’ve been in supply chain for 10 of my 20 years here so I understand part shortages, I understand expediting. I know you have the challenges on the manufacturing floor because you have to pull parts from the warehouse and it takes you X amount of time.’”
One of the Change Agents explained why it was important to convey valued knowledge and expertise when reflecting on her work with an IT department: “I think technical IT people don’t respect people who don’t understand technology. And especially in this company… like if you are a luddite, you will have a hard time building credibility […] By being seen as somebody who uses technology to do something non-traditional, I think it’s a powerful statement to those people.” This sentiment was echoed by the Vice President of Global Operations with whom the Change Agent had a lot of work experience: “We have a lot of trust with [the Change Agent], she understands what we do in the supply chain process, and she has an understanding of where we could make changes and she works with us to encourage us. That trust is there and it works very well.”

**How gaining legitimacy supports direct cultural change work.** As change agents engage in legitimacy-gaining work, they increase their perceived legitimacy, which in turn supports their direct cultural change work. In my analysis, I identified three ways in which increased perceived legitimacy can support change agents’ direct cultural change work: *increasing access to resources; increasing symbolic power; and increasing access to interactions.*

Increasing access to resources. As change agents gain perceived legitimacy, others are likely to provide them with resources such as data and intelligence that they can use in their other cultural change. For instance, as one Change Agent gained increased legitimacy in the eyes of a group of employees with whom she was working, they began providing her with more data and plans about their projects: “People find the data for her, they want to walk down the line with her, this makes it much faster […]”
People love to work with her, and they see she has the good knowledge, and they then want to keep working with her and share” (Site Operations Director). Other employees similarly began “opening up their opportunity funnel” to a Change Agent with information about their customers and their prospects, which the Change Agent could then use in her interactions.

Increasing symbolic power. As proposed by Hallett (2003), as change agents gain perceived legitimacy, they in turn gain symbolic power, which refers to the ability to shape meanings (Bourdieu, 1991; Hallett, 2003). Change agents can then use this symbolic power to have greater influence on shaping others’ meanings in their interactions. One of the Change Agents noted that gaining increased legitimacy with employees from one of the international sites made employees more open to his ideas and suggestions about sustainability:

“I think it's part of the reason why we're going again to [this international site]. No questions asked, yes, please. They're asking us to go again. They're willing to listen. If we had something new for them, they would be more inclined to listen to us now than ever. Each time, we keep bringing them something different, and we're trying to arm them. Because they listened once, and then we brought something else. And we brought something. You've got to earn that right.”

As another example, a Global Human Resources Manager reflected that the Change Agents’ increased legitimacy made her more open to considering what they have to say:

“They've earned... I say this they've earned the right to talk about what they're talking about because they've done their research et cetera, and because I trust them. If I didn’t trust them personally, we probably wouldn’t have open candid conversations. We would probably be walking away, I know I would be walking away going, ‘Yeah, you don’t really understand and what you’re asking me to do doesn’t work. We’re not going to go that way, and I'm not going to try.’”

Increasing access to interactions. Finally, as change agents gain perceived legitimacy, it makes way for repeat interactions and opens doors for new interactions.
Employees who had already interacted with the Change Agents became more open to scheduling additional meetings. A Business Development Manager, for example, suggested that if he didn’t see one of the Change Agents as legitimate, he wouldn’t have had as much time to meet with her and “wouldn't be able to spend much time on [sustainability].” Employees were also more likely to broker connections between the Change Agents and their contacts. For example, a Change Agent reflected that a senior leader opened up access to his entire team after he saw her as a legitimate partner to work with:

“The [customer] account team is loving it, both the internal and external teams. They have this innovation summit and look for crazy ideas. The VP of the [customer] account has given me carte blanche to work with their team and they have let me go to [an international site] to work with the team there.”

They were also willing to broker connections with external partners such as customers.

A Change Agent reflected:

“I get so much latitude for talking to customers. What has now happened to many of our major accounts is that when I first started out, the customer teams would always want to sit on every call with me. Now they are like '[Change Agent], we need you to go and talk to our customer directly. Love the info you’re getting for us.’ I’m now being seen as an extension of the customer team, instead of being seen as a hindrance or another bureaucracy they have to deal with.”

Gaining legitimacy through successful direct cultural change work. While increasing levels of perceived legitimacy supports change agents’ direct cultural change work, successfully engaging in direct cultural change work can also help change agents increase their legitimacy. For instance, a Change Agent’s successful engagement in tailored support work was highly appreciated by a Site Engineering Director, who perceived this type of interaction as rare at ManufactureCo:

“I normally work with the global teams, and I found she is quite different. She is looking at what we have, and looking at other areas that can use the equipment
and how their requirements can apply to us. So this was really key, and I like that. Compared to other global person who would say you have to use our solution, or you do this bad. I also think it is good that she thinks that we are progressing and doing well, they don’t force us to use their solutions or make us follow an example. A lot of engineering setups exist, and she doesn’t touch that, just tries to help. Other corporate would say you have to do this, use this server, use this."

One of the Change Agents similarly reflected on how getting her hands dirty through tailored support work helped her distinguish herself from other employees doing similar work in the organization:

“I made it easy to work with me. A lot of corporate people fly in and they wave their hands around and then they fly out. I stuck with them. I walked on the floor. I spent a week working shoulder to shoulder with these guys where you see a lot of corporate guys stay in the meeting rooms and never get out onto the floor. They come with a lot of talk, but they don’t have a lot of actual meat behind what they’re... They don't have avenues to get towards something.”

Additionally, as employees successfully engaged in new sustainability-related actions, they began to see the Change Agents as more legitimate. A Change Agent, for example, explained how others perceived her as possessing desirable knowledge after she supported a successful integrated sustainability action:

“So we pitched it and got the business case, the investment was a sub-one-year payback. Then at the same time we had [a customer] coming in and saying we will make you pay 1 million dollars for an energy solution. What that did for us was that it drove home that [an employee with whom the Change Agent worked on the initiative] had the team and technology, and I had the ideas.”

Another Change Agent described this effect this way:

“Going to [an international site], finding the problem […] [another international site], going there, finding an issue or an opportunity […] that gave me the legitimacy to help drive other change […] that's what has driven the success in the end […] some of our senior leaders, they'll come to us now because they know we have enough legitimacy that it'll give... it's not that it's, ‘Oh, if the sustainability team says that we should, we're doing it.’ But it's they'd almost rather come to us.”
Summary. My analysis suggests that change agents can increase others’ perception that they and their actions are legitimate. As change agents engage in legitimacy-gaining work, they increase their perceived legitimacy which, in turn, supports their direct cultural change work in three ways: increasing access to resources, increasing symbolic power, and increasing access to interactions. Change agents’ successful engagement in direct cultural change work can, in turn, increase change agents’ level of perceived legitimacy.

The reciprocal effects of direct cultural change work. While engaging in indirect cultural change work can support change agents’ direct cultural change work by increasing their access to resources, increasing their symbolic power, increasing their access to interactions, and increasing the applicability of their direct cultural change work, engaging in direct cultural change work can also support change agents’ indirect cultural change work by providing them with resources with which to craft their indirect cultural change work. In terms of the linkage between direct cultural change work and legitimacy-gaining work, instances of successful cultural elevation and cultural integration can provide examples and case studies with which change agents can gather proof points and elevate the work of others. For instance, a Site Operations team’s actions to increase energy literacy, an example of an integrated sustainability action that was shaped through the cultural integration pathway, proved to be a powerful example that a Change Agent could use to position that team in a positive light during the abovementioned acceptance speech. Similarly, employees’ improvement of working conditions gave the Change Agents the resources with which to garner external
One of the Change Agents reflected on how his work with Site Facilities employees helped him gather proof points and elevate the work of others:

“[A site] just did their ISO 50001. They just said they want to send out a [Corporate News Story]. And they said that, ‘Would you read it? Is there anything that we can change?’ One of the things that I’ve suggested that they change or they add is that they add a picture of the energy management team to give themselves... They thanked the team. They forgot to thank all the employees, so I added that. Then I also said, ‘Look, put a picture in there of the actual team that will help.’”

In terms of the linkage between direct cultural change work and preparatory work, change agents’ direct cultural change work can provide them with materials on which to reflect through reflective work, which in turn can shape their planning of subsequent work and their choices about what knowledge building they should engage in. One of the Change Agents described this linkage this way:

“So, the prep work I did for [a Manufacturing Department] took me forever. I kind of was able really quickly do prep work for Finance because I had, I knew what to do [...] I knew I needed to ask a couple questions about how the business worked. I needed to know some of the tools, and it just made it faster and faster and faster [...] intuitively when I went to the next one, oh yeah. These are the things that unlocked [the Manufacturing Department] for me.”

Finally, in terms of the linkage between change agent’s direct cultural change work and relational work, change agents who succeed in direct cultural change work are likely to have a broader range of ideas and examples to use in their efforts to cultivate relationships. For instance, it is likely that the abovementioned Change Agent’s efforts to cultivate relationships externally through creating a symposium around waste packaging were strengthened by that Change Agent’s earlier integrated support work in helping employees reduce packaging waste. Engaging in direct cultural change work can also help change agents develop skills in how to communicate with different people throughout the organization. One of the Change Agents described this linkage this way:
"It gives you tools and things to say [...] it's building out your organizational intuition, so the more you hear, the more you can trust your organizational intuition, right? [...] I'm not saying that every person is the same, but you can start to figure out the type of people that you need to talk to [...] it identifies the archetypes and the people that you need to build relationships with. [...] Because with some people you can get in with just, you can get in just saying, 'Your customer care is about sustainability. I'm here to help.' With other people, and this is the archetype thing, right? I need a data guy to do something in a factory, and I need a money guy. So, I need to know how to talk about TPS reduction. I need to know how to talk about MVA, so every time I'm doing one of these projects, I'm gaining that organizational or institutional language that builds my legitimacy, and builds my ability to go in and build a quick relationship."

**Summary.** Change agents can engage in indirect cultural change work, which refers to efforts to improve and develop their own capacities to undertake direct cultural change work more effectively. I identified three overarching forms of indirect cultural change work: change agent legitimacy-gaining work, preparatory work, and relational work. Each of these forms of indirect cultural change work supports change agents’ engagement in direct cultural change work in different ways. Collectively, these mechanisms are: increasing access to resources, increasing symbolic power, increasing access to interactions, and increasing the applicability of direct cultural change work. Change agents’ direct cultural change work can help change agents increase their legitimacy directly, and can also support all three forms of their indirect cultural change work by providing them with resources with which to craft it.

4.7 **Summary of the Findings**

Green Future was launched as an initiative to integrate ‘sustainability’ into ManufactureCo’s organizational culture and the daily work and decisions of its employees. It was rolled out by team of five Change Agents who did not have formal authority over the employees that they were trying to influence. In analyzing my data,
my focus was on developing theory about the cultural change work of change agents attempting to integrate a focal meaning into other elements of an organization’s culture and into employees’ workplace actions. I thus focused on unpacking the various forms of cultural change work undertaken by the Change Agents and the effects they had on employees’ interpretations of ‘sustainability’ and their engagement in sustainability-related actions.

Based on my data analysis, I developed two inductively-derived pathways of cultural change – the cultural elevation pathway, and the cultural integration pathway – that are underpinned by different forms of direct cultural change work. While the two pathways are distinct, they are interrelated and can support each other. In the cultural elevation pathway, change agents engender the elevation of a focal meaning through broad meaning-making work by augmenting employees’ specific interpretations of the focal meaning. This elevation of the focal meaning equips employees to increase their engagement in peripheral actions. Change agents’ broad support work helps enable employees to deploy their elevated focal meaning in peripheral actions. Finally, successful engagement in peripheral actions reinforces the elevation of the focal meaning through a process of cultural reinforcement.

In the cultural integration pathway, change agents engage in tailored meaning-making work, which fosters cultural integration by building connections between the focal meaning and other meanings comprising an organization’s culture. It does so by building connections between the focal meaning and employees’ work in ways that are specific, grounded, and tangible. Cultural integration equips employees to engage in integrated actions, which differ from peripheral actions in that they involve employees’
core daily work and/or expertise. Change agents can also engage in tailored support work, which influences employees’ engagement in integrated actions in two ways: by enabling employees to deploy their newly-integrated meanings, and by dampening the potentially constraining effects of a selection of other meanings. Similar to the other pathway, employees’ successful engagement in integrated actions reinforces cultural integration through a process of cultural reinforcement.

In addition, I identified three forms of indirect cultural change work and unpacked the mechanisms through which each can support, and is in turn supported by, direct cultural change work. Change agents can engage in change agent legitimacy-gaining work, preparatory work, and relational work, which collectively support direct cultural change work by increasing their access to resources, increasing their symbolic power, increasing their access to interactions, and increasing the applicability of their direct cultural change work. Direct cultural change work can in turn support indirect cultural change work by providing change agents with the resources with which to craft their indirect cultural change work. It can also directly increase change agents’ legitimacy.
CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

“The role of the manager in this process, regardless of who adopts it, it complex, risky, and difficult. It calls for an unusual blend of skills and attitudes, as well as sensitivity, awareness, and courage. It is the manager’s job to deal successfully with the implications of an unconsciously rooted, unpredictably unfolding, equifinal organizational condition. He or she needs to be able to confront or respond to organizational culture much as a therapist would, probing and unraveling the web of cultural experiences, as a wildcatter drilling the cultural terrain, to find and release hidden or blocked human resources.”

(Kretting & Frost, 1985: 157)

The focus of my dissertation was on unpacking the cultural change work of internal change agents and analyzing its role in cultural change. To explore this phenomenon, I studied the cultural change work of a team of internal change agents from ManufactureCo who were tasked with rolling out Green Future, a sustainability-oriented cultural change initiative. I adopted an emergent, exploratory research strategy, in which I emphasized gaining an in-depth, cross-validated, and processual understanding of the forms and impact of the Change Agents’ cultural change work to develop inductively-grounded theory about cultural change work. In this chapter, I discuss the contributions I make to research on organizational culture and cultural change work. I then discuss the contributions to practice suggested by my findings. I conclude by discussing the limitations of my dissertation and suggesting avenues for future research.

5.1 Contributions to Research

Despite a growing recognition that outcomes of cultural change initiatives are best not seen in dichotomous terms (e.g. Harris & Metallinos, 2002; Harris & Ogbonna, 1998, 2002), much prior work on cultural change tends to focus on identifying forms of work through which individuals can shape ideational elements of culture without paying much attention to the potentially diverse outcomes on meanings and actions that these
different forms of work may engender (e.g. Howard-Grenville & Bertels, 2012; Schein, 1983). As a result, prior work leaves us with a limited understanding of the outcomes of different forms of cultural change work and of how these different forms of work might be interrelated and support each other. By directing my attention to the diverse forms of cultural change work undertaken by the change agents in this setting and the outcomes of that work, I make contributions to three conversations on cultural change work and organizational culture: the work of deploying ideational elements of culture; how change agents can develop their capacities to engage in direct cultural change work; and the nature of cultural change work.

**The work of deploying ideational elements of culture.** My analysis lends insights into the work change agents undertake to help individuals deploy ideational elements of culture, which refers to individuals’ putting culture to use in constructing their actions. While we know that culture can have a constitutive role (Swidler, 1986, 2001), we still have an incomplete understanding of how and why individuals select which elements of culture they will deploy (Giorgi et al., 2015; Small et al., 2010) and what factors might constrain individuals’ agency in deploying culture (Weber & Dacin, 2011). My dissertation makes three contributions to this body of work: adding to our understanding of how existing elements of an organization’s culture can constrain employees’ deployment of culture; adding to our understanding of how change agents’ support work can help other employees deploy culture; and demonstrating how employees can gain experience deploying new and enhanced elements of their culture as part of their daily work. I discuss each of these in turn.
First, my findings add to our understanding of how existing elements of culture can constrain employees’ deployment of culture. Scholars have cautioned that without an understanding of the factors that might constrain the deployment of culture, we will be left with an incomplete understanding of the nature of agency in organizational culture: “If culture is a resource as much as it is a constraint, and if individuals and organizations use diverse repertoires to pursue their ends, then understanding how and when actors acquire and deploy these repertoires becomes a central concern” (Weber & Dacin, 2011: 292). Prior work is relatively limited, finding that power relations and resources (Kellogg, 2011) and structural factors such as societal stability (Weber and Dacin, 2011) can be important constraints on the deployment of culture. Yet, can an organization’s existing culture constrain the deployment of culture? If so, how?

Research is largely silent on this potential relationship, which is curious given the longstanding recognition that culture in itself can be a powerful force shaping the actions individuals take. Prior work has tended to acknowledge culture’s potential constraining role in a broad sense, yet much less attention has been focused on how culture can constrain different components of cultural change processes. Alvesson (2013), for instance, argues that both top-down and localized initiatives to change culture can be constrained by an organization’s culture. He argues that “cultural manifestations within any collective, but even more so within a larger one, including perhaps thousands of employees, comprise a very heavy counterweight to the possibilities of a top figure exercising influence on people’s thinking and feelings” (2013: 193) and that “local initiatives are also frequently constrained by broader organizational culture as well as by relations of power” (2013: 190).
My dissertation demonstrates that existing elements of an organization’s culture can act as a constraint on an individual’s deployment of new or expanded cultural elements. Furthermore, in this setting, I found that it was only a subset of the existing meanings (‘failure aversion’, ‘drinking from the firehose’, ‘thrifty’, and ‘procedural and detail orientation’) that constrained the deployment of the newly-integrated focal meaning by reducing employees’ willingness and ability to engage in the actions that would have integrated the focal meaning into their core work. Thus, existing elements of an organization’s culture can act as a constraint on the deployment of culture and this constraining effect need not be homogenous. This highlights the constraining effect of existing elements of an organization’s culture on the deployment of culture and the understanding that this constraining effect need not be homogenous.

My dissertation also demonstrates that the constraining effects of particular elements of culture are unlikely to affect all microprocesses of cultural change in the same manner. While I observed that a subset of existing meanings constrained the deployment of culture, they did not appear to constrain cultural integration or cultural elevation in this case; therefore, the constraining effects of meanings need not affect all microprocesses of cultural change initiatives in the same way. In some cultural change initiatives, existing meanings might constrain the deployment of culture, while in others they might constrain the elevation or integration of a focal meaning. This moves us away from a view of cultural elements acting as a homogenous constraining or enabling force across organizations to a view that suggests that the constraining effect of culture may well vary.
Second, my findings add to our understanding of how change agents’ support work can help other employees deploy culture. Prior work exploring the factors that influence individuals’ deployment of culture is limited (Giorgi et al., 2015; Small et al., 2010), suggesting that specific cultural cues such as the media (DiMaggio, 1997) and “opportunities and constraints” (Lamont & Thévenot, 2000, cited in Giorgi et al., 2015: 16) influence which resources individuals choose to deploy in specific contexts. Weber (2005) has pointed out that individuals may only be skilled at using a limited array of cultural resources at a given time and that deploying cultural resources is challenging and requires learning and practice. Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2011) demonstrated how change agents could help develop individuals’ capacity to use culture by crafting liminality, in which individuals can gain experience with the deployment of new ideational elements of culture. Yet, there are likely to be there other ways individuals can develop skills in deploying culture in their actions.

My dissertation demonstrates how support work on the part of change agents can be a crucial factor in influencing whether and how individuals deploy culture. In this setting, I found that change agents’ broad and tailored support work was crucial in enabling employees to deploy elevated or newly-integrated meanings, without which cultural reinforcement was unlikely to take hold. The broad and tailored support work undertaken by change agents each supported employees’ deployment of culture in different ways. Change agents’ broad support work facilitated the deployment of newly-elevated meanings into peripheral actions through its enabling effect, while their tailored support work facilitated the deployment of newly-integrated meanings through its enabling effect and by dampening the constraining effects of elements of the existing
culture. Attending to the support work of change agents is an important complement to the more common focus on identifying forms of work that shape ideational elements of culture, as it informs our understanding of how those ideational elements can be deployed into employees’ actions, reinforcing changes in ideational elements.

Third, my dissertation demonstrates that individuals can gain experience with ideational elements of culture in the absence of invoking liminality. Howard-Grenville and colleagues (2011) demonstrated that liminality can be a powerful context in which individuals can experiment or play with novel ideas and experience how these might fit into their culture. In the absence of larger change efforts, change agents can craft liminality both outside and inside the organization by transforming events “with significance beyond their instrumental functions” (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011: 529). The authors identified two ways in which change agents could craft liminality: “bracketing the everyday, in which experiences were demarcated as simultaneously connected with and separate from the everyday, and inviting a new form of relating, in which role-based interactions receded in importance” (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011: 529). As one example, “Annie, as part of the action learning program, brought people together to work on projects related to their organizational expertise. Participants were encouraged to explore ideas that might be seen as too experimental for their everyday work” (Howard-Grenville et al., 2011: 532). In contrast, in my setting, the change agents rarely bracketed the everyday and they did not engage in inviting new forms of relating; instead, they grounded their interactions in employees’ immediate tasks and work expectations. Given the cultural elevation achieved through the broad meaning-making work undertaken in this context, the change agents may have been able to engage
more directly in cultural integration through their tailored meaning-making work without the need to invoke liminality. This suggests that liminality may not be necessary in all contexts.

**Building capacity through indirect cultural change work.** My findings also extend our understanding of how change agents without formal authority can develop their capacity to effectively undertake their direct cultural change work. Prior research on cultural change work curiously tends not to investigate how change agents can improve their own capacity to engage in cultural change work. Even in fields outside of organizational culture, the notion of work to develop one’s capacities is relatively new in the literature. In recent work, Bertels and colleagues (2014: 1199) identified a form of institutional work they called indirect institutional work, which is “focused on creating the capacity to do future institutional work more effectively”. One form of this work is securing resources for others, an example of which is supplying funds and tools for other organizations (Bertels et al., 2014). They contrast indirect institutional work with direct institutional work, which is directly targeted at the creation, maintenance, and disruption of institutions (e.g. Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006; Lawrence et al., 2009). Bertels and colleagues (2014) argue that such a distinction may exist in other forms of work, a concept that is yet to be applied in the field of cultural change, possibly because of the tendency to focus on senior leaders as focal change agents, who often have access to formal authority and thus may be perceived to need less capacity development. My analysis makes three contributions: identifies three forms of indirect cultural change work; expands our understanding of how change agents can gain legitimacy; and points to a reciprocal link between direct and indirect work.
First, my analysis identifies three forms of indirect cultural change work through which change agents without formal authority can increase their capacity to engage in direct cultural change work. Some prior work has focused on capacity development, in particular, the potentially enabling role of gaining legitimacy. For instance, Hallett (2003) argues, and Hallett (2007) finds, that legitimacy can be an important resource for change agents, particularly when individuals lack formal authority over those they influence (Hallett, 2007). This finding is echoed by Daudigeos (2013), who argues that perceived legitimacy can help staff professionals overcome their lack of formal authority.

In this setting, I identified three overarching categories of indirect cultural change work: change agent legitimacy-gaining work, relational work, and preparatory work. I found that each of these forms of work supported change agents’ direct cultural change work in different ways: change agent legitimacy-gaining work through increasing access to interactions, increasing symbolic power, and increasing access to resources; relational work through increasing access to interactions and increasing access to resources; and preparatory work through increasing applicability. Because each form of work supports direct cultural change work in different ways, each may be more suitable in different contexts and under different circumstances. For instance, in cases where the applicability of cultural change work is particularly important, preparatory work may be more useful, whereas in cases where interpersonal connections are particularly important, relational work and change agent legitimacy-gaining work may be more useful. This signals the importance of better understanding the diverse forms of indirect cultural change work and their associated mechanisms.
Second, my analysis expands our understanding of how change agents without access to formal authority can gain legitimacy. Work on how change agents gain legitimacy has tended to focus on changes in deep-seated personal characteristics, such as individuals’ dispositions (Hallett, 2003) and the cultural capital they develop throughout their lifetime (Hallett, 2007), or, in one case, internal and external networking as legitimacy-gaining tactics (Daudigeos, 2013). Hallett (2003) also suggests that gaining legitimacy increases an individual’s symbolic power and thus their ability to shape meanings during their interactions, although Hallett (2003: 146) cautions that the number of people who can successfully gain and deploy symbolic power is likely to be low, describing these people as “rare and exceptional”. However, my findings demonstrate that it is possible for everyday change agents to gain legitimacy.

My findings suggest a wider spectrum of work through which legitimacy can be gained than discussed in prior work, including gathering proof points, elevating the work of others, walking the walk, aligning with salient meanings, and demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge. I found that this change agent legitimacy-gaining work supports direct cultural change work through increasing change agents’ access to interactions, symbolic power, and resources. Notably, my analysis suggests that the way change agents manage others’ perceptions of them is an important means of gaining legitimacy, particularly, whether their behaviour is perceived as aligned with that they espouse, whether they are perceived to possess valuable skills and knowledge, and whether their behaviour is perceived to be aligned with other salient meanings. Finally, my analysis provides empirical support for the link between gaining legitimacy and gaining symbolic power and further demonstrates that gaining legitimacy also
increases change agents’ access to interactions and resources. If we are to gain a
deeper and more holistic understanding of how individuals can gain and use legitimacy,
it would be fruitful for researchers to investigate a broader range of work through which
change agents can gain legitimacy and pay closer attention to the mechanisms through
which gaining legitimacy can support direct cultural change work.

Third, my analysis points to a reciprocal link between direct and indirect work.
Bertels and colleagues (2014) likened indirect institutional work to pushing a ball up a
hill, providing the stored energy that would allow direct institutional work to speed down
the other side. Yet this metaphor implies a link between indirect work and direct work
that is unidirectional; that is, indirect work is seen as a means of facilitating direct work.
They also suggest that organizations are likely to specialize in either direct or indirect
work due to the difficulty of engaging in both forms. As described earlier, in this setting I
found that indirect cultural change work supports direct cultural change work through
several mechanisms. Yet, I also found that direct cultural change work supports indirect
cultural change work by providing change agents with the resources with which to craft
their indirect cultural change work. This suggests that indirect and direct cultural change
work may in fact be mutually reinforcing and that change agents attuned to this
bidirectional effect may be more active in resourcing (Feldman, 2004; Howard-Grenville,
2007) their everyday direct cultural change work experiences by actively reflecting on
them, in turn spurring changes to their indirect cultural change work that can improve
their subsequent direct cultural change work.

**Tailoring and the nature of cultural change work.** Last, I enrich our
understanding of the nature of cultural change work by demonstrating how the extent to
which cultural change work is tailored to a particular audience can affect the outcomes of cultural change initiatives. Tailored meaning-making work engendered the integration of a focal meaning into other meanings by creating grounded, tangible, and specific connections between employees’ work and the focal meaning, while broad meaning-making work engendered the elevation of the focal meaning, but didn’t engender the integration of the focal meaning because of its general and abstract nature. This signals that the degree of tailoring of cultural change work matters.

While Hallett (2003) proposed that culture can shift through interactions, the outcomes of the interactions Hallett (2003) discusses are likely to vary widely based on whether the content and delivery of the interactions are tailored to a particular audience, or whether they rely on content that is general in nature. Similarly, Sonenshein (2016) proposed that change agents’ meaning-making work can shape interpretations of social issues. Yet, Sonenshein’s (2016: 356–357) practice of labeling – “construct[ing] a plausible interpretation of what the issue means by using a label to concisely convey a compelling interpretation of the issue” – is likely to have different outcomes depending on whether the label selected is tailored to particular audience in an organization. More tailored labeling could, for instance, result in an issue being deemed as more legitimate and less equivocal than could broad labeling. I also found that tailoring can be undertaken in a variety of ways, and that skilled change agents will select their specific forms of work by paying close attention to how a focal meaning connects to a particular audience and its work. For instance, in cases in which a focal meaning is likely to be an opportunity, change agents should convey how the focal meaning can be an opportunity, and in cases where there is a clear link between a focal meaning and
aspects of an audience’s work, change agents should reframe work around the focal meaning.

**Summary of contributions to research.** My dissertation makes three overarching contributions to work on cultural change and organizational culture, expanding our understanding of: the factors that constrain and enable the deployment of culture; how change agents can improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work; and the nature of cultural change work, including how different types of cultural change work can have different effects. When taken as a whole, my findings paint a picture of change agents as skillful navigators of their organizational culture that combine a deep understanding of their organization’s culture with an evolving repertoire of cultural change work, echoing the words of Krefting and Frost (1985: 157):

“The manager of an organizational culture or cultural change process is rather like a surfer who must ride a wave to its conclusion, always facing the risks of unexpected swirls from the depths beneath the wave as well as the unpredictable air movements on and above the surface [...] In dealing with the organizational culture, a manager needs to be close enough to understand the culture and yet detached enough to see beyond the cultural blinders—that is, to see the existing culture as a social construction that can change and be changed. He or she must react, interact, and act, using symbols and imagery, to release and develop the potential of the organization, and accept the risks involved in doing so.”

5.2 Contributions to Practice

My findings also have important practical implications for change agents and change designers considering or in the process of pursuing cultural change initiatives. As will be described in in Section 5.4, however, it is important to bear in mind that my
data are drawn from a single case study of cultural change, with the possibility that these practical implications may not transfer to all settings in the same way.

- Organizations undertaking large-scale cultural change initiatives should create enough change agent roles to be able to undertake the work required to achieve the goals of the cultural change initiative. For instance, an organization with the goal of elevating a focal meaning such as sustainability or diversity may need fewer change agent roles than an organization with the goal of integrating a focal meaning into other meanings throughout the entire organization.

- Important skills that effective change agents undertaking cultural change initiatives should possess include:
  - a strong and in-depth understanding of their organization’s business model;
  - an in-depth conceptual and technical understanding of the focal meaning;
  - an in-depth understanding of the organization's operating context;
  - strong interpersonal skills and the ability to interact with a wide range of people at various levels in the organization;
  - and a strong understanding of, and skills working with, their organization’s culture and norms to know how best to approach new departments and their leaders and to be able to communicate concepts in a way that aligns with employees’ existing knowledge and skills.
• Change agents without these skills should receive training or mentorship to be able to develop these skills as early as possible.

• Organizations should look internally when searching for change agents that are expected to engage in tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work. Ideally, organizations would search in departments in which employees gain exposure to a variety of the organization’s core business processes. Because of its more general and abstract nature, organizations could look externally for change agents expected to undertake broad meaning-making work and broad support work.

• Change agents should be aware of the goals of their cultural change initiative and customize their choice of direct cultural change work to their goals. For instance, if their goal is to integrate a focal meaning into other meanings, they should engage in work including reframing employees’ work around the focal meaning and seeding opportunities related to the focal meaning. If they desire to also shape employees’ actions, they should ensure they engage in support work. They should also regularly reflect on the nature of their work to make sure it is aligned with their goals.

• Change agents should ensure they are engaging in sufficient efforts to increase their perceived legitimacy, develop relationships, and prepare for their other work. Some change agents may be predisposed to focus on only a limited or narrow portion of this work, limiting their effectiveness.
5.3 Avenues for Future Research

My findings suggest three fruitful avenues for future research: investigating new directions on cultural change work; investigating the impact of national culture and institutions on cultural change; and investigating the antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcomes of these categories of sustainability-related actions.

Towards a research program on cultural change work. My findings point to the benefits of investigating in greater depth the phenomenon of cultural change work. First, future research should investigate the cultural change work of other individuals in organizations, including regular employees, middle managers, and senior leaders. While my dissertation focused exclusively on unpacking the cultural change work of internal change agents, I also found that several other individuals at ManufactureCo likely influenced interpretations of ‘sustainability’ and employees’ sustainability-related actions. Future work could investigate the cultural change work of other actors – including middle managers, external change agents, and senior leaders – and analyze its interconnections with the work of internal change agents. Alvesson and Sveningsson’s (2007) research design is an exemplar of what a useful research design would look like. Secondly, future research should investigate the skills necessary to engage in direct and indirect cultural change work and explore how change agents can develop these skills. It would be particularly fruitful for scholars to investigate the skills that can help change agents work with the enabling and constraining elements of organizational cultures. Third, future research could build on my findings regarding the bidirectional link between indirect and direct cultural change work. For instance, there are likely to be additional mechanisms through which direct cultural change work
supports indirect cultural change work, as well as factors that can moderate the ability of each form of work to support the other. Fourth, as discussed in Section 5.1, it would be fruitful for scholars to investigate tailored and broad variants of previously-identified forms of cultural change work to explore their impacts on cultural change. Finally, future research could investigate the comparative effectiveness of different forms of cultural change work that are undertaken in liminal spaces or in employees’ everyday work.

The impact of national culture and institutions on cultural change. Second, my findings suggest that it may be fruitful to investigate the impacts of national culture and broader institutions on the process of sustainability-oriented cultural change. Scholars have long argued that there is a dynamic link between organizational culture and national culture (e.g. Alvesson, 2013; Schein, 2010; Weber, 2005) and that differences in national culture can affect company-wide change programs in MNCs (e.g. Charles & Dawson, 2011; Leung, Bhagat, Buchan, Erez, & Gibson, 2005). Scholars have also suggested that sustainability issues are prioritized, understood, and acted on differently among different countries. For instance, Pinkse, Kuss, and Hoffman (2010) argue that regulations and their enforcement varies among countries, affecting whether companies can adopt a global environmental strategy. These findings suggest that national culture could have important effects on processes of sustainability-oriented cultural change, which could contribute not only to work on sustainability but also on the dynamic interplay between national and organizational culture. In addition, while research on organizational culture and institutional theory has generally developed independently, there are important opportunities to study the interplay of culture and institutions, particularly in terms of understanding the dynamics of meanings at multiple levels of
analysis (Aten, Howard-Grenville, & Ventresca, 2012). Studying the impact of broader societal institutions on processes of sustainability-oriented cultural change could be an important way to add insights to the link between culture and institutions.

_Broadening our conception of sustainability-related actions._ Finally, building off the distinction between integrated and peripheral sustainability actions, I suggest it would be fruitful to investigate the antecedents, moderators, mediators, and outcomes of these categories of sustainability-related actions. Scholars are increasingly drawing a conceptual distinction between actions that are prescribed and those that are voluntary (e.g. Boiral & Paillé, 2012). Prescribed actions are required of employees and can include directives to create sustainable products or processes; voluntary actions are not required of employees—they exceed task specifications (Norton et al., 2015) and can include encouraging others to be more sustainable. While the distinction between prescribed and voluntary actions may be analytically important to address some research questions such as what factors influence voluntary pro-sustainability actions, it may not serve the needs of research and practical questions relating to the degree to which sustainability becomes integrated throughout an organization and its daily operations because it doesn’t capture the extent to which sustainability is integrated into employees’ work. Distinguishing between integrated and peripheral sustainability actions could be more analytically useful for addressing this phenomenon.

Future research could build on this distinction. For instance, it is likely that peripheral and integrated actions will have different impacts on organizations’ financial and sustainability performance, and may also have different impacts on individual factors such as employees’ engagement and job satisfaction. They may also have
different antecedents, as suggested by Fugas, Silvia, and Meliá (2013), who found that different safety behaviours (in their case compliance and proactive behaviours) can have different profiles. Following Norton and colleagues’ (2015) framework for analyzing research on employee green behaviors, future work on peripheral and integrated sustainability actions could theorize or test factors at the institutional, organizational, leader, team, and individual levels.

5.4 Limitations

As with any study, my dissertation has limitations. First, there is the possibility that some participants’ responses may have been affected by social desirability bias, whereby they may have desired to present themselves as supportive of ManufactureCo’s cultural change initiative. This may have been augmented by the fact that the organization sanctioned my presence as a researcher. While I acknowledge this possibility, I feel it was mitigated because participation was voluntary, I signaled that there are no right answers during interviews, and the Change Agents only received a high-level summary of findings without any participant identifying information. Indeed, as outlined throughout the findings, many participants did express views that were critical of the cultural change work of the Change Agents, describing how it had some limitations.

Second, my data are drawn from a single case study of cultural change. While single-case designs provide rich insights, their findings may not transfer to other contexts due to the potential uniqueness of phenomena observed in that setting (Yin, 2003). The types of cultural change work required to bring about cultural change may
differ across organizations. As I described in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, ManufactureCo is a business-to-business organization facing challenging and complex customer demands, in a very low-margin industry, with an organizational culture characterized by thrift, a customer-orientation, failure aversion, sustainability, a detail and procedural orientation, a goal orientation, a constrained innovation orientation, and perceptions of employee overwork. For instance, while support work figured prominently in this setting, it may not be as necessary in organizations with less failure aversion, more slack in terms of employee time and financial resources, or a more flexible approach to processes and details. Additionally, while ManufactureCo already had an established meaning for sustainability, different kinds of meaning-making work might be necessary in organizations where the focal meaning of interest is not already an element of the organization’s culture. There may, for instance, be greater levels of resistance to cultural change initiatives that relate to focal elements that do not have a firm grounding in an organization’s culture. Investigating processes of sustainability-oriented cultural change at other organizations would help to explore whether there are differences in the salience of these forms of cultural change work in different contexts and whether there are other mechanisms that help explain processes of cultural change.

Third, when conducting qualitative work, researchers must ward against privileging some views and voices over others (Hammersley, 2008) and reflect on their own biases that they bring to their interpretations (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007). While it is possible that I may have privileged the views of some participants over others and been biased in my interpretations, I took several steps to minimize and address this. I was very inclusive in seeking out the perspectives of a wide range of employees
at ManufactureCo, and I undertook many of the actions recommended by Creswell (2009) to limit potential bias, including describing my relationship with the Change Agents and discussing how I gained access to the research site.

Fourth, as I described in Chapter 3, there is the possibility that I influenced employees’ interpretations and actions through my presence and interview questions, and the possibility that I influenced the Change Agents’ cultural change work due to the high-level feedback I gave them. To address this limitation, I was careful in my analysis to avoid confounding my own influence with the explanatory factors I was theorizing about by paying particular attention to unpacking the specific mechanisms through which any changes in the integration of meanings and changes in actions may have occurred.

Finally, while my dissertation draws on data covering most of the roll-out of Green Future, I only began gathering in-depth data on employees’ perceptions in 2014, which is one year after the launch of Green Future. This meant that I needed to rely on employees’ retrospective accounts when discussing work that took place before I began my fieldwork, primarily the roadshows that underpinned the calls to action.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

"[You've] got to make it grass-roots, understandable, and meaningful to people’s roles. When it’s just talk about, you know, we want to do more for the environment, what does that mean? That’s where these more higher up messages lose clarity and then stop meaning things to people" (Site Operations Director).

While there is a growing practitioner and scholarly interest in cultural change, we still know relatively little about the microprocesses of how organizational culture changes (Morrill, 2008; Thomas et al., 2010), particularly when driven by individuals outside of senior leadership positions (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2007; Howard-Grenville et al., 2011). In my dissertation, I sought to unpack the cultural change work of change agents without formal authority. I adopted the perspective of cultural change, which I argue focuses more on the micro level and on the integration of elements into an organization’s culture rather than the destruction or replacement of cultural elements. Adopting an emergent and inductive research strategy, I investigated the cultural change work of a team of five internal change agents undertaking a sustainability-oriented cultural change initiative at ManufactureCo, a North America-based global technology manufacturing company.

Based on my data analysis, I developed two inductively-derived pathways of cultural change – the cultural elevation pathway, and the cultural integration pathway – both of which were underpinned by different forms of cultural change work (broad meaning-making work and broad support work, and tailored meaning-making work and tailored support work, respectively). I also identified three forms of indirect cultural change work – change agent legitimacy-gaining work, relational work, and preparatory work – and unpacked the mechanisms through which each can support, and is in turn
supported by, direct cultural change work. Collectively, these forms of indirect cultural change work support change agents’ direct cultural change work by increasing their access to resources, increasing their symbolic power, increasing their access to interactions, and increasing the applicability of their direct cultural change work. Direct cultural change work can in turn support indirect cultural change work by providing change agents with the resources with which to craft their indirect cultural change work. It can also directly increase change agents’ legitimacy.

My dissertation makes three contributions to research on organizational culture and cultural change work. First, it expands our understanding of factors that can constrain and enable the deployment of culture. Second, it lends insights into how change agents can improve their own capacity to undertake direct cultural change work through engaging in indirect cultural change work. Third, it expands our understanding of the nature of cultural change work by pointing to the effects of tailored versus broad work. Collectively, my dissertation paints a picture of change agents as savvy navigators of culture that combine an appreciation for their organization’s culture with a diverse repertoire of cultural change work. My dissertation also makes numerous contributions to practice, providing change agents and designers of cultural change initiatives with specific guidance on how to structure their initiatives and how to successfully affect changes in meanings and actions.
References


Kennedy, S., Whiteman, G., & Williams, A. 2015. Sustainable innovation at Interface: Workplace pro-environmental behavior as a collective driver for continuous


Appendices

Table 1: Data sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Quantity and Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Interview data**| • 222 interviews undertaken with 128 participants as part of this project, of which:  
  o Role of participants: 43 interviews were with the Change Agents and 179 were with change recipients  
  o Geographic breakdown of interviews: 141 from Headquarters, 29 from AsiaManufacturing1, 12 from AsiaManufacturing2, 25 from AmericasManufacturing, and 15 from other international sites  
  o Medium used: 185 were in conducted in person and 37 were conducted virtually  
  • 10 contact summaries from brief conversations with the Change Agents throughout this project.  
  • 6 interviews with the change agents from another research project touching on Green Future (all recorded). |
| **Observational data** | • Field notes from 133 days of on-site observations and notes from virtual meetings I observed. Contain a total of approximately 190,000 words of text. |
| **Secondary data** | • A total of 103 internal and external documents which include reports, presentations, newsletters, and documents. |
Table 2: Sample data structure

**Broad meaning-making work**

**Definition:** Efforts to advance interpretations of a focal meaning, targeted broadly throughout the organization, typically through indirect interactions.

**Related first-order categories:** Calling to action, educating, and capturing and broadcasting stories

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Capturing and broadcasting stories</th>
<th>“We have already developed a website. We have developed a database. This is sort of a success story linked on the website that where all of these things will be kept and people can access. We’re launching this biweekly storytelling process so that people will know” (Change Agent).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition:</strong> Capturing stories of employees engaging with a focal meaning and broadcasting them throughout an organization.</td>
<td>“We send out regular [Green Future news stories] that highlight different success stories from around the globe. Quarterly, we also share success stories through our [Employee Volunteering] program because that’s part of it” (Communications Manager).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Cultural elevation**

**Definition:** The attribution of greater prominence and importance to a particular focal meaning.

**Related first-order categories:** Greater source of pride and greater strategic priority

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greater strategic priority</th>
<th>“When I think about sustainability here, I think about the pillars we have set up, the fact that it has lots of air time, that it is being pushed out to all of the sites, and that we have [the lead Change Agent] who was very persuasive in getting our organization focused on it” (EH&amp;S Manager).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition:</strong> The perception that sustainability is a greater strategic priority for the organization.</td>
<td>“I think it is a priority for the company, the fact that they’ve made the investment of having that team in place” (Site Supply Chain Manager).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Peripheral actions**

**Definition:** Actions undertaken by employees that relate to a focal meaning but do not involve their core work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.

**Related first-order categories:** Environmental sustainability-related actions and social sustainability-related actions

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**
Environmental sustainability related actions

Definition: Actions undertaken by employees related to environmental sustainability that do not involve their work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.

“Well I no longer leave my light on when I leave the office. I think about recycling more than I used to. I don’t have a garbage can in here. Small things like that” (Contracting Manager).

“Like more people using two pages of paper, cut off their computer, cut off the lights. Some stuff like that. Maybe before they didn’t do it, now they do it” (Site HR Analyst).

Broad support work
Definition: Creating an underlying supportive infrastructure that enables employees to undertake actions related to a focal meaning.
Related first-order categories: Supporting idea generation, creating engagement opportunities, and creating engagement communities
Coding example (first-order category, sample data):

Creating engagement opportunities
Definition: Efforts to create specific, structured events and activities designed to enable employees to engage in actions related to the focal meaning.

“We created a wellness committee at the site. We also brought in several organizations like Weight Watchers. The cafeteria also brought in a lot of healthy eating options. They have their own logo called “Health Wise” and put a sign up when the offer those items. They include things like vegetarian options and also offer some fresh fruit and salads. So here there has been a lot of work and at each of the site there is something going on” (Change Agent).

“Today in the morning I went to buy a coffee and saw [a Change Agent] and two people from the wellness committee at a table promoting carpooling and the other initiatives, each of which had a piece of paper taped onto a table. As I walked by the first time, [the Change Agent] was asking somebody to check out carpooling” (field notes).

Tailored meaning-making work
Definition: Efforts to advance interpretations of a focal meaning, customized to a particular audience, typically through direct interactions.
Related first-order categories: Reframing work around the focal meaning, conveying specific risks and threats of existing interpretations, conveying specific benefits of the focal meaning, and seeding opportunities.
Coding example (first-order category, sample data):
**Reframing work around the focal meaning**

**Definition:** Demonstrating to employees how their current and future daily work and projects both impact and are impacted by the focal meaning.

"[A Change Agent] did this a really good way for us... [The Change Agent] does a great job converting this to actually making sense to people... like x numbers of cars, and trees. And she has tools that he can use to come up with these" (Sales Director).

"It's just it's casting a light and giving an opportunity to frame these initiatives in new ways beyond just cost cutting and beyond just like the financial bottom line" (Change Agent).

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**Cultural integration**

**Definition:** The integration of a focal meaning into other meanings that comprise the organization's culture.

**Related first-order categories:** ‘Sustainability’ integrated with: ‘Customer orientation’, ‘thrifty’, and ‘innovation in a box’.

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Sustainability’ integrated with ‘thrifty’</th>
<th>“So, a lot of these things are closely related to cost reductions. So, while we have Co2 and environmental implications, we also have a cost reduction that would often be the major impetus” (Global Transport Manager).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Definition: The interpretation that a focus on sustainability could be a means of identifying novel ways of reducing costs.</td>
<td>“At the end of the day I’m always a bit suspicious of corporations, but there is really a big benefit for the environment, reducing the carbon footprint, and also the financial benefit” (Global Transport Manager).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Integrated actions**

**Definition:** Actions undertaken by employees that relate to the focal meaning and involve their core work tasks, roles, and/or expertise.

**Related first-order categories:** Improving working conditions for other employees, incorporating sustainability into the customer value proposition, quantifying and reducing the impact of core work processes, and integrating sustainability into purchasing decisions.

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quantifying and reducing the impact of core work processes</th>
<th>“We recently deployed a project where we moved more efficient air compressors, variable speed air compressors, to [Building A], where we have a high consumption rate of compressed air, away from [Building B], where it’s very low. We replaced the requirements in [Building B] with much smaller, 5-kilowatt compressors, moved variable speed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
related impacts of core work processes and identifying ways to reduce them.

| compressor with 75-kilowatt, over to [Building A], to replace a 150-kilowatt 6-speed compressor. Hence, basically reducing the electricity consumption for compressed air by 50%” (Site Facilities Manager). |
| “In the past one or two years, we are starting measuring our carbon footprint in terms of logistic freight movement, working with our carriers on the air, ocean, trucking, in identifying any ways to reduce the carbon footprint, and doing more environmentally friendly ways through logistics process” (Global Transport Manager). |

| Tailored support work |
| Definition: Work undertaken to enable others to undertake actions related to a focal meaning, customized to employees' individual work. |
| Related first-order categories: Brokering relationships, providing data and insights, providing technical support and tools, supporting brainstorming, providing communications support, and providing fire cover. |
| Coding example (first-order category, sample data): |
| Providing technical support and tools |
| Definition: Support work in which change agents provide tools, solutions, and hands-on technical support to help employees engage in new integrated actions. |
| “What we were doing was basically writing equations and understanding in each of those zones, what proportion was related to certain types of equipment. We don’t get exact information but we will get a close approximation of our real-time consumption. We are now able to get better data and put it into a format where we can now make judgement calls. What that has led to is...this is the real dashboard. I now have a live dashboard on energy consumption” (comments from a Change Agent during a meeting, captured in field notes). |
| “[A Change Agent] comes in with different tools and different ways of encouraging” (Global Transport Director). |

| Preparatory work |
| Definition: Individual cognitive work aimed at constructing cultural change interactions. |
| Related first-order categories: Building underlying knowledge, planning work, and reflective work. |
| Coding example (first-order category, sample data): |
| Planning work |
| Definition: Constructing and developing concepts, |
| “I’ve come up with this way to estimate the energy that we use building a single circuit board. I built that tool on my own over here [at Headquarters]. I’ve collated all the results” (Change Agent). |
communications, and materials to support change agents when undertaking their cultural change work.

“Just as we were leaving […] [a Change Agent] showed me a new kind of pallet she just got from [a supplier]. It is all made from recycled cardboard and weighs 12 pounds instead of 35. She was really excited to go tell everyone in [Global Transport] and [Sales] about this. She pulled out her spreadsheet in front of me which showed how by using this you can cut total eight of a load by about 7%” (field notes).

### Relational work

**Definition:** Efforts to cultivate and develop relationships internally and externally that are relevant to the cultural change initiative.

**Related first-order categories:** Developing internal relationships, and, developing external relationships.

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**

| Developing internal relationships | “The fact that… again, just pleasantries, it’s just its … you don’t have to get right into the heart of a conversation right away. That’s never been my belief. You can, but then you wrap it up as well with, “What else is going on, and wants do, or how are things?” it doesn’t… we are all human. This place can get you down. You got to remember that you are talking to a real-life person on the other end of the phone a lot of the time […] Not that I want to be everyone’s friend, but if you and I can connect at a level of its not just about work, its, ‘Oh, this guy is pleasant to speak with.’ Then you talk, and then go into work. It just unlocks that communication. Facilitates the dialogue going forward” (Change Agent).

“...It’s about being empathetic and building that relationship. You can’t win in this game if you are confrontational and you have to build long-term relationships” (comments from a Change Agent captured in field notes). |

### Change agent legitimacy-gaining work

**Definition:** Work undertaken by change agents to increase others’ perception that they and their actions are desirable, proper, and appropriate.

**Related first-order categories:** Gathering proof points, elevating the work of others, walking the walk, aligning with salient meanings, and demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge.

**Coding example (first-order category, sample data):**

| Demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge | “I think how I’ve managed to win people over has been to put myself in their shoes and to understand their role. To not just be the person who acknowledges and says, ‘You |
**Definition:**
Demonstrating that one has the skills and knowledge that are valued by a particular audience.

| can fix it' but the person who really says, 'I know that challenge. I have been there before.' I think if they see that you get it and you've experienced it and you've shared with them the challenges you've also had in that same role, that I think has helped me win over some of the Operations folks” (Change Agent).

"Within that team, we have people that are engineers, we have people that have grown up in the business. They know about the way that certain businesses run within ManufactureCo, that they can certainly talk to different processes and the footprint and what we're saving and et cetera" (Global Human Resources Manager). |
Figure 1: Cultural elevation pathway

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(A)</th>
<th>(B)</th>
<th>(C)</th>
<th>(D)</th>
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| • Calling to action  
• Educating  
• Capturing and broadcasting stories | • Greater source of pride  
• Greater strategic priority | • Environmental sustainability-related  
• Social sustainability-related | • Supporting idea generation  
• Creating engagement opportunities  
• Creating engagement communities |
Figure 2: Cultural integration pathway

- **(A)**
  - Reframing work around the focal meaning
  - Conveying specific risks and threats of existing interpretations
  - Conveying specific benefits of the focal meaning
  - Seeding opportunities

- **(B)**
  - ‘Sustainability’ integrated with:
    - ‘Customer orientation’
    - ‘Thrifty’
    - ‘Innovation in a box’

- **(C)**
  - Improving working conditions
  - Incorporating sustainability into customer value proposition
  - Quantifying and reducing the impact of core work processes
  - Integrating sustainability into purchasing decisions

- **(D)**
  - Brokering relationships
  - Providing data and insights
  - Providing technical support and tools
  - Supporting brainstorming
  - Providing communications support
  - Providing fire cover
Figure 3: Interplay between indirect and direct cultural change work

**INDIRECT CULTURAL CHANGE WORK**

**PREPARATORY WORK (A)**
- Building underlying knowledge
- Planning work
- Reflective work

**RELATIONAL WORK (B)**
- Developing internal relationships
- Developing external relationships
- Increasing access to relationships
- Increasing access to resources

**CHANGE AGENT LEGITIMACY-GAINING WORK (C)**
- Gathering proof points
- Elevating the work of others
- Walking the walk
- Aligning with salient meanings
- Demonstrating context-specific skills and knowledge

**DIRECT CULTURAL CHANGE WORK**

- Providing resources
- Increasing applicability
- Increasing symbolic power
- Increasing legitimacy