PROPOSAL SUMMARY – RESEARCH DESCRIPTION

THE STRENGTH OF SOCIAL ASSESSMENTS AND INFLUENCE IN DETERMINING
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
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PROBLEM: THE COMPLEXITIES OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE
Successful organizational change is often difficult and infrequent, it has unanticipated consequences and some researchers believe that it can even increase the chance that an organization will fail (March, 1981; Hannan and Freeman, 1977). But organizational administrators know that sometimes attempting not to change is a failure in and of itself. The research aims to learn more about change so organizations, like schools, have a better chance of managing it successfully. The specific objective is to determine how people’s opinions and the influence of those opinions over others can make a difference for organizational change.

Studies about the connection between peoples’ social relationships and their understandings of different situations (Coleman, 1966; Burt, 1987) along with findings about the nature of strategic and institutional change (e.g. Dutton and Duncan, 1987; Oliver, 1991) predict that organizational change depends on whether people in the organization believe change is feasible (e.g. the means of change are known and available), urgent (e.g. the change initiative is highly visible and subject to time or external pressure), effective (e.g. the change will result in performance gains in important areas) and legitimate (e.g. the change is consistent with existing organizational practices and expectations). People do not, however, come to these conclusions on their own; they are influenced by what other people believe. The theory predicts that whether or not an organization changes depends on what people believe and with whom they interact.

LEARNING TO PREDICT CHANGE IN SCHOOLS: A TEST OF THE THEORY
Testing the theory in a real organization is an important part of learning about how successful organizational change happens. Though many organizations could benefit from the potential findings of the study, the research team believes the need is most pressing in organizations whose outcomes matter most for young people and the continued development of the society’s human and social capital – public schools. This study includes only New York City public schools with students enrolled in grade eight or lower; the study is purposefully designed to include schools with diverse performance histories and institutional experiences. This school
along with six other comparison schools was identified as providing a unique context for being able to make predictions about the impact of opinions and social influence on organizational change. The data collection procedure and its impact on the daily operations of the school are described below.

Beginning in February 2005 all teachers and administrators who agree to participate in the study will be asked to compete about their opinions of change and their experiences as part of the professional community in this school. The survey takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. The surveys are administered at full staff meeting and/or are provided in staff’s school mailboxes with a postage paid business reply envelop for teachers and administrators to return the survey by mail. Participants who do not return surveys within two weeks are provided a follow-up letter and an additional copy of the survey materials. A baseline surveys will be administered once before the close of the 2004-2005 school year. Subsequent surveys will be administered in October, February and June of the 2005-2006 and 2006-2007 school years. Some participants will be asked to participate in a 20-minute interview session to provide more in-depth information about their experiences with school change. All interview and survey sessions will only be scheduled for times when participants are not with students.

IMPACT ON THE SCHOOL
This study provides an opportunity for teachers and administrators to reflect on their own attitudes about education reform. The positive results of the study may help the school think about organizational change in new ways. Most participants will devote 90 minutes per year (3 30-minute survey sessions) to the study in each of three years (a total of 4.5 hours over the three years). Participants who are interviewed will devote an additional 80 minutes per year (4 20-minute interviews) in each of three years over a three-year period (a total of 4 hours over the three years). Participants agreeing to complete the surveys over the three-year period will receive $70 per year. There are no known risks associated with this research beyond those of everyday life. No deception or coercion is required by the study. All participants will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at anytime without penalty, including assessments of their organizational performance. All responses provided in surveys and interviews will be confidential and identities will be protected with assigned code numbers. Only the researcher team will have access to the data. At the conclusion of the study an executive summary describing the results will be provided to all participants. An afternoon
workshop for feedback and discussion of the study and their usefulness for the school will be offered for all interested participants.

If you have questions about the research you may contact the co-primary investigator at (212) 998-0265, ebridwel@stern.nyu.edu or 44 W4th St. Suite 7-155 KMEC New York University Stern School of Business – Department of Management and Organizations, New York, NY 10012. You may also contact the research’s primary investigator and faculty sponsor, Stephen J. Mezias at 212-998-0229 or 40 W4th Street, Suite 7-23 Tisch Hall, New York University Stern School of Business, New York, NY 10012. For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University Committee on Activities Involving Human Subjects, Office of Sponsored Programs, New York University, 212-998-2121.