

## **Reviewer's report**

**Title:** A theory of organizational readiness for change

**Version:** 1 **Date:** 21 April 2009

**Reviewer:** Wayne Lehman

### **Reviewer's report:**

This paper describes a theory of organizational readiness for change which is defined as an organizational-level construct referring to “organizational member’s shared resolve to implement a change (change commitment) and shared belief in their collective capability do to do (change efficacy).” One key component of the definition of organizational readiness for change is that it is based on shared perceptions of organizational members. The author describes readiness in psychological terms and argues that the emphasis on structural terms by others are subsumed in the change efficacy judgments of organizational members. Another key component of the theory is that it is situational, not a general state of affairs. It refers to readiness to implement a specific change in a specific organization.

The theory includes two key determinants of readiness to change. Change valence or the extent to which members value the change impacts change commitment. Members will not be committed to change if they do not value it. Three factors are postulated to affect change efficacy. These are task demands, resource availability, and situational factors. The author argues that broader organizational factors such as culture or policies or procedures affect readiness through the more proximal factors such as change valence, and task, resource and situational factors.

In terms of outcomes, the author argues that when organizational members share perceptions that they are committed to a specific change and believe they can implement they change, they will be more likely to initiate change, exert greater effort toward the change, exhibit greater persistence in change behaviors and display more cooperative behaviors. These behaviors will then ultimately lead to an increased probability of implementation effectiveness.

### **Major Compulsory Revisions**

1. This reviewer finds several significant problems with the proposed theory as described. Perhaps most importantly this paper does not spell out where this theory will lead us, what advances for the field, either in a scientific or practical way that may result from this theory. For example, given the constructs and relationships described in the theory, what does this tell an organization that needs assistance in implementing a new and complex technology? The author concludes that the keys to increasing readiness are raising change valence and promoting a positive assessment of task demands, resource availability and situational factors. But change valence is a key component defining readiness to

change according to the theory; thus raising readiness to change by raising a major component of its definition amounts to a tautology. The author also argues that increasing readiness can be accomplished by promoting a positive assessment of task demands, resource availability and situational factors, which the theory states are key determinants of change efficacy. Yet it seems unlikely that simply promoting a positive assessment of these factors will increase readiness without directly addressing the issues that cause them to be limiting factors in the first place. For example, what aspects of task demands are limiting factors and how might tasks be redefined in order to better prepare for change? If resources are a barrier to change, what additional resources are needed in order to prepare for change? The theory provides no guidance on how to identify the limiting factors or how to fix them. In fact, the author concludes that readiness-enhancing strategies are equifinal, that is, many different strategies may lead to equally positive results. However, the theory does not provide guidance on how to select a strategy based on the constructs in the theory, only that they should be tailored to local needs, opportunities and constraints. Thus every situation is different and there is little guidance on how to proceed.

2. Related and significant problems with the theory are the measurement issues. The author critiques most publicly available instruments for measuring organizational readiness for change as having “limited evidence of reliability and validity.” Yet in order to measure the central constructs of this situation-specific theory, situation specific measures need to be constructed, which belies building measures with established reliability and validity. Each study of readiness for change for a specific organization would require measures customized to the specific change being considered. Although the author does provide some general guidelines for necessary characteristics for what he proposes the best instrument should have, he provides no specifics or solutions to the general problem of developing situation specific measure that have established and acceptable reliability and validity. For example, he states that adequate measures would need to have “some means of focusing respondents’ attention on a specific impending organizational change” and “efficacy items that are tailored to the specific organizational change, yet not so tailored that the instrument could be used in other circumstances without substantial modification.” It is not clear how this would be accomplished and still have measuring instruments that have established reliability and validity.

3. The theory fairly quickly dismisses views of organizational change in terms of structure that emphasize financial, material, human and informational resources by pointing out that members take into consideration assets and deficits in formulating their change efficacy judgments. However, many organizational members are not likely to be in a position where they can fully assess the organization’s capacity for change in terms of its structural components and they may not be in a position to know exactly what task demands, resources, and situational factors are required for a specific change. Thus relying simply on members’ perceptions of these factors as determinants of change efficacy provides an incomplete picture of readiness without considering the objective levels of resources actually needed for a specific change. The theory also

dismisses readiness for change as a general state of affairs in favor of a specific state for a specific change, setting up a false dichotomy of views of organizational readiness for change. While it may be true that a specific organization may exhibit a high level of readiness for one type of change but not another, an organization that does not have a general readiness and capacity to implement change will not be ready for either.

#### Minor Essential Revisions

Several editing corrections should be made --

Pg 2, para 2, line5 – “organizational” should be “organizations”

Pg 6, para 1, line 5 – “the” at end of line should be “they”

Pg 9, para 1, line 8 – “member” should be “members”

Pg 9, para 1, line 10 – “In fact, it is” should be “In fact, it”

Pg 11, para 1, line 13 – extra space before comma after “teams)”

**Level of interest:** An article of limited interest

**Quality of written English:** Acceptable

**Statistical review:** No, the manuscript does not need to be seen by a statistician.

**Declaration of competing interests:**

I declare that I have no competing interests.