OVERCOMING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE BY MANAGING READINESS FOR CHANGE

Dennis R. Self, Troy University

ABSTRACT

Within the field of change management there has been extensive material written on “how to manage change” successfully such that those change-related goals of organizations are met. However, a review of the literature also reveals that not all change efforts are met with success. As this paper shows, one rationale for this failure to manage change through to success is a failure to create readiness for change in the first place; however, by managing the creation of readiness for change, an organization is more likely to achieve that desired success. By identifying specific resistance beliefs and then applying to each of them specific elements that lead to readiness for change, a means of changing these resistance beliefs is identified.

INTRODUCTION

Over the past few decades organizations have experienced significant change. Whether global environment changes (Ghoshal, 1987), workforce changes (Lerman & Schmidt, 2002), technological changes (e.g., Connor, 1992; Wannberg & Banas, 2000), a strongly competitive environment (Vollman, 1996) or an economic environment that is increasingly volatile (Hoskisson, Eden, Lau, & Wright, 2000), organizations have been forced to adapt to and, when possible, anticipate such change by reinventing themselves through organizational redesign (Greenwood & Hinings, 1988), changing the organizational culture (Gilmore, Shea, & Useem, 1997) or using some other means. The organization that fails to respond, or respond in a timely fashion, runs the great risk of, at best, being passed by other more nimble competitors, at worst, ceasing to exist (Collins, 2001; Vollman, 1996).

A failure to respond in an effective manner, however, does not mean that the organization has failed to recognize the need for change. Academic literature is full of articles providing various strategies for implementing change in an organization (cf. Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 1999; Beer, Eisenstat, & Spector, 1990a; Caruth, Middlebrook, & Rachel, 1995; Galpin, 1996; Kanter, 1991; Kotter, 1995). However, despite this plethora of strategies and tactics designed to guide organizations to successfully implement change initiatives, most major changes fall short of intended goals (Gilmore et al., 1997). Some researchers (e.g., Choi & Behling, 1997) have posited that the failure rate for major change initiatives could exceed 75% of those initiatives implemented. Pascale, Millemann, and Gioja (1997) reported a Harvard Business School study in which only about one-half led to an improvement in market share price. In another study (Maurer, 1996) less than one half of the reported changes were successful.

With such a poor track record of change implementation, it would appear that organizational managers have failed to understand fully what is necessary to succeed in guiding their organizations through a change initiative. Failing to properly plan for the implementation of a change initiative may lead not only to failure of the change initiative, but also to reduced...
employee morale and commitment and increased cynicism (e.g., Gilmore et al., 1997; Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; Nutt, 1986; Schweiger & DeNisi, 1991). One aspect of not properly planning the implementation of a change initiative was failing to recognize possible employee resistance toward change (e.g., Del Val & Fuentes, 2003; Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2001). However, effective management of the change process (and preventing or minimizing resistance to the change initiative) is not impossible. Through the use of previously developed change strategies, it is possible for management to increase the likelihood of a successful change implementation. One such change management model applying certain strategies to implement a change initiative was the institutionalization of change model developed by Armenakis et al. (1999). The model focused on the creation of readiness for a change initiative, guiding the organizational members to adopt the change, ultimately making the initiative the permanent way things are done around here.

The purpose of this paper; therefore is to identify specific resistance beliefs, and, through the application of the five elements of the readiness for change message developed by Armenakis and his colleagues (1993, 1999) provide a means of changing these resistance beliefs to readiness beliefs.

RESISTANCE AND READINESS FOR CHANGE

Resistance to change

What is resistance? Maurer (1996) defined it as, “a force that slows or stops movement” (p. 23). Bridges (1986) suggested that it is an incomplete transition in responding to change. Kotter (1995) posited that resistance is an obstacle in an organization’s structure that prevents change. Other researchers defined resistance to change by its displayed behaviors. For example, Hultman (1995) argued that resistance consists of two dimensions: active and passive. Active resistance would include such behaviors as being critical, selective use of facts, sabotaging, and starting rumors. Passive resistance is displayed by such behaviors as public support but failure to implement the change, procrastinating, and withholding information or support.

Palmer, Dunford, and Akin (2006) framed their discussion of resistance to change in terms of why people resist change. Drawing from a number of sources (e.g., Dym, 1999; Maurer, 1996; Reger, Mullane, Gustafson, & DeMarie, 1994; Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Sensaker, Meyer, Falkenberg, & Haueng, 2002), Palmer et al. offered 14 different reasons why people may resist change (Table 1).

The concept of resistance to change is not without its critics, however. Dent and Powley (2003), for example, argued that there is not even a commonly held definition for resistance to change. They listed at least 10 ways that resistance to change is defined in the literature, all definitions qualitatively different. Drawing from Pasmore and Fagans (1992), Dent and Fowley concluded that a more accurate reading of resistance to change might be one of whether or not organizational members are able to change. Pideret (2000) preferred to describe resistance to change as more that of ambivalence to change. Indeed, it is obvious that not all change is resisted. Stensaker et al. (2002) observed that people willingly embrace some change and work to support it. Kirkpatrick (2001) provided a number of change-related outcomes in which people
welcome change, including examples such as salary increases, promotions, increased autonomy in one’s job, better working conditions, greater sense of achievement, etc. Wheatley (in Maurer, 1996) said, “I absolutely believe that the whole focus on resistance to change is just a by-product of very bad change processes. The resistance we are experiencing in organizations says nothing about human nature or our innate ability to deal with change in a changing world” (p. 51).

Wheatley’s comment, thus, brings the reader back to the starting point: Most change initiatives tend to fail because of “bad change processes.” As Piderit (2000) noted, “Successful organizational adaptation is increasingly reliant on generating employee support and enthusiasm for proposed change, rather than merely overcoming resistance” (p. 783). Thus, the first step in the process of implementing a change initiative is that of creating readiness for the change.

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of change.</td>
<td>People simply do not want to change.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort with uncertainty.</td>
<td>Dislike of ambiguity, fear of the unknown.</td>
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<td>Perceived negative effect on interests.</td>
<td>Impact on status, rewards, security.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Attachment to the culture.</td>
<td>Change conflicts with organizational identity; values or beliefs and norms of organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived breach of psychological contract.</td>
<td>Related to trust and loyalty. The organization is not honoring “its side of the bargain.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of conviction that change is needed.</td>
<td>Different levels have different perceptions of whether a change initiative is a necessary change initiative. “It ain’t broke. Why are we trying to fix it?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of clarity as to what is expected.</td>
<td>Different levels have different perceptions of the intent of a change initiative, or what exactly is expected of organizational members to support the change initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that the specific change being proposed is inappropriate.</td>
<td>Different levels have different perceptions of whether a change initiative is the right or necessary change initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that the timing is wrong.</td>
<td>Conditions are not right for change now. The organization is still trying to cope with a previous change, morale is low, it could impact customers, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excessive change.</td>
<td>Too much simultaneous equals change fatigue, low morale, even the convergence of different change initiatives could create bigger problems than they are designed to fix due to negative interactions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumulative effects of other changes in one’s life.</td>
<td>Related to both organizational and personal changes in an organizational member’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perceived clash with ethics.</td>
<td>Members resist because the change initiative is perceived to clash with their own ethical principles, or they perceive the change clashes with the ethical principles of the organization.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Reaction to the experience of previous changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reaction to the experience of previous changes</th>
<th>Disagreement with the way the change is being managed.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Negative past experiences result in cynicism and a <em>this too shall pass</em> attitude.</td>
<td>The change initiative is not necessarily disputed, rather, how it is being implemented. To an extent, this gets at the credibility of the change leader.</td>
</tr>
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### Readiness for change

The genesis of readiness lies in Lewin’s (1947) concept of *unfreezing* or getting organizational members to let go, both physically and psychologically, of the current ways of doing things within the organization. Management must provide evidence that the current ways are no longer acceptable or appropriate if the organization is to remain successful or regain success. Perhaps the earliest study of unfreezing or creating readiness was Coch and French’s (1948) study in an apparel facility in which management was able to demonstrate to employees that current production methods could not continue, by comparing the pajamas made by the firm with those of a competitor and showing that, while the two pairs of pajamas were identical in quality, the competitor’s pajamas cost half as much. Although this study was initially described as an example of overcoming resistance, later reviewers (Bartlem & Locke, 1981; Gardner, 1977; Jacobson, 1957) of the study argued that this demonstration of the competing pairs of pajamas was more that of preparing the organization for a necessary change. Beer (1987) described an organization’s readiness based on its social, technological, and systemic capability to change. Beckhard and Harris (1987) refered to readiness as having to do with “…willingness, motives, and aims…” (p. 61). Armenakis, Harris and Mossholder (1993) contended that readiness exists when organizational members feel a change is required and the organization and its members have the ability to make the change. Hanapachern (1997) defined readiness as, “The extent to which individuals are mentally, psychologically, or physically ready, prepared, or primed to participate in organization development activities” (p. 11). Thus, these and other definitions (e.g., Huy, 1999; Killing & Fry, 1990) frame organizational readiness as that of awareness, acceptance, and capability of organizational members to be involved in the implementation of change initiatives in their organizations.

Taken from this perspective, a critical responsibility of management is to prepare the organization for a change initiative by creating readiness for the change initiative in the organizational members. One approach to creating readiness (as well as managing the change implementation process) was proposed by Kotter and Schlesinger (1979). They offered six methods including, among others, education and communication, participation and involvement, facilitation and support, and even explicit and implicit coercion. However, Armenakis and his colleagues (1993, 1999) defined readiness as the cognitive evaluation made by the member that can lead to the member’s support for or resistance to the change initiative. Thus, if the first step of the implementation process is properly done, the organizational membership should be ready to adopt, if not embrace the change. If the first step is improperly done, some members may actively or passively resist the change initiative (Figure 1).

Armenakis et al. (1999) believed that readiness for change is created in the message delivered by management to the organization’s members. The introduction of a new change initiative can create uncertainty and concern for the future in the minds of organizational
members. The change message is used to address the uncertainty and concern by answering five questions: Is the change necessary; is the change being introduced the right change to make; are key organizational members supportive of the change; do I or we (the organizational members) have the ability to successfully implement the change; finally, what is it for me if we change. These questions are answered through five components of the change message.

The first component, labeled discrepancy by Armenakis et al. (1993, 1999) answers the first question, “Is the change necessary?” Discrepancy is defined as the difference between the current state and an ideal or desired state. Until organizational members are aware that the current state is not desired and that a different state is preferred, there will be no incentive to consider a change. Beer et al. (1990a) argued that change will not occur until organizational members recognize that there is a “clear and present danger; a tangible and immediate problem that must be confronted if the organization is to remain economically viable” (p. 55). Spector (1990) argued that sharing information with organizational members would enable them to realize the current state could not be continued.

The second component is appropriateness. This component answers the question, “Is this the right change?” When a change initiative is introduced into an organization, it must be recognized that this is not done in a vacuum. In recognizing the need to change, organizational members will ask, “change to what?” Not only must management demonstrate there is a need to change, it also must provide information that the proposed change initiative is the correct one. Beckhard and Harris (1987) observed that the key diagnostic question to answer in introducing a change initiative is what the initiative is intended to correct or improve. Yet, management must recognize even if organizational members agree that a change is necessary, they may still disagree with the proposed change initiative (Kissler, 1991). Kissler described an organization in which management pushed to create a more participative environment, getting organizational
members more involved to improve organizational effectiveness. While mid-level supervisors agreed with the need to improve the organization’s effectiveness, they were not in favor of shifting to a more participative workplace. However, not only does there have to be agreement that the proposed change initiative is appropriate, but also there must be agreement that the initiative is congruent with the culture, structure, formal systems, etc. of the organization (Buller, Saxberg, & Smith, 1985). Thus, the change initiative’s fit with the organization is as important as whether or not the initiative is the right one.

Finally, if the organization has gone through previous changes, changes that did not prove to be as successful as had been desired, especially if there is a perception that the change was mismanaged, management must understand that a certain level of cynicism may exist in the minds of the organizational members. Armenakis et al. (1999) referred to a program of the month attitude that can develop in organizational members. In Beer et al. (1990a) one line manager reacted negatively to a proposed change, stating, “So often these programs were seen as gimmickry by the working people and as magic by [upper level] managers…I am just not interested in another short-lived program” (p. 41). Thus, the failure by management to effectively diagnose problems and identify the change initiatives that are appropriate for successfully resolving those problems has a negative impact on the ability of management to create and manage readiness for change. Because of mismanagement of past changes, organizational members may believe that, this time, no change is really necessary and, even if one is perceived as necessary, whatever management has proposed will be the wrong one.

The third component is principal support. It answers the question, “Who supports this change?” For Armenakis et al. (1999) principal support was necessary to, “provide information and convince organizational members that the formal and informal leaders are committed to successful implementation…of the change” (p. 103). When a change initiative is introduced, organizational members will look to see if management is serious about the proposed change, especially if there was no follow-through for past change initiatives or if the past changes failed. Attempting to make sense of the change initiative and management’s motives, organizational members will seek information from sources other than those managers introducing the change. The sources are those viewed as reliable. Larkin and Larkin (1994) observed that “Programs don’t change workers—supervisors do” (p. 85). Larkin and Larkin believed that the frontline supervisor is the most important individual in enlisting support from organizational members for a change initiative. The organizational member, when top management announces a change, turns to his or her immediate supervisor for an explanation of the meaning of the change. If the immediate supervisor is also unaware of the justification for the change, readiness could be impacted for both the member and the supervisor. Likewise, peers of the organizational member are also important in providing meaning to a proposed change initiative. Rosseau and Tijoriwala (1999) found that while organizational members in a hospital did not trust top management, nevertheless, they trusted the perceptions of their peers.

Although evidence has been presented for the importance of immediate supervisors and peers in creating readiness for change, it should not be assumed that this level of support is the only level that matters. Change is typically introduced by and driven by top management. Thus, their reactions to a proposed change initiative carries great weight in the minds of organizational members. Covin and Kilmann (1990), for example, reported that the visibility of support for and
commitment to a change created a positive perception of the change, whereas, a visible lack of support or inconsistent behaviors on the part of management led to a negative perception of the change. A final example of the importance of principal support was described by Vollman (1996). Vollman was a consultant for a firm with a management information system that was in disarray. Vollman and his associates recommended a new system to bring order to the organization. Nevertheless, a key executive, who opposed the change, held so much power within the organization that Vollman and his associates also recommended that the organization wait until the executive completed his scheduled retirement before implementing the needed change.

The fourth message component proposed by Armenakis et al. (1999) is that of efficacy. Efficacy addresses the question of “Can I/we successfully make this change?” Bandura and Locke (2003) defined efficacy as, “…the power to produce desired effects; otherwise one has little incentive to act or to persevere in the face of difficulties” (p. 87). Galpin (1996) contends that management has the responsibility to provide organizational members with the training and education needed to implement successfully a change initiative. This is important because the members may lack the confidence that the change can be successfully implemented. Past failures by management to provide such education or training to prepare the organization for change can lead to organizational members not only not having confidence in themselves that they can be successful in implementing a change, but having a lack of confidence in management’s ability to lead them in implementing the change. Conversely, management may even doubt the abilities of the organization’s members to be successful, or its own abilities. This perspective fits research by Ketterer and Chaynes (1995), McCall (1993), and Vollman (1996). Ketterer and Chaynes suggested that organizations must develop the leadership talent necessary to enable the organization to meet the challenges of a changing environment. Thus, development and training of potential leaders is imperative. McCall observed that failing to select, train, and promote individuals equipped to deal with a changing environment could lead to a management team’s being ill-equipped to recognize the need for change, and then successfully guide the organization through the process of change. Finally, Vollman contended that the high-failure rates observed in change initiatives could be a result of management’s failure to understand the knowledge, skill, and ability requirements necessary for an organization to be successful in implementing a change initiative.

The final component of the change message for creating readiness is valence. When faced with a change in their present situation, organizational members will ask, silently or vocally, “What’s in it for me/us?” Armenakis and his colleagues (1993, 1999) observed if the individual, impacted by a deviation from present policies or procedures, perceived there was no benefit to changing, or if the pain of changing outweighed the gain from changing, then the organizational member would resist the change. Conversely, if it can be demonstrated that the member would be better off from the change, at least in the long run, the member would be more likely to embrace the change. This evaluative judgment of the change is a key component of valence. Goodman et al. (1980) focused on the attractiveness of the change outcomes. Thus, it is not just whether or not there is a benefit to changing, but how attractive the benefit is to the member. Even if management has demonstrated there is a need for a particular change initiative and the organization will be better off for it, and even if the organizational member recognizes this, he or she will still focus on how the change individually impacts him or her. Even individual change
can be questioned. Management might reward an organizational member with a promotion, but
be surprised that the organizational member turns down the promotion. Management’s view that
this is a reward is negated by the organizational member’s view that tied to the promotion is a
transfer to the night shift, which creates great inconvenience for his or her family.

In a field study, unique because the researchers were able to compare an experimental
group against a control group, Schweiger and DeNisi (1991) were able to demonstrate the
importance of management’ recognizing of valence issues. In an organization engaged in a
merger at one plant, management provided detailed information to the plant employees on the
impact of the merger, including how they would be affected. At the other plant (the control
plant), scant information was provided other than a merger was forthcoming. At the plant
receiving the detailed information on the merger, plant employees responded in a positive
fashion; however, at the plant receiving little information, morale declined to such a low level
that the company’s management found it necessary to stop Schweiger and DeNisi’s
communications experiment early and give the control plant the same level of information that
the other plant had received. As a number of researchers (e.g., Brockner, Konovsky, Cooper-
Schneider, Folger, Martin, & Bies, 1994; Kim & Mauborgne, 1993; Moorman, 1991; Skarlicki &
Folger, 1997) have found the way the organization treats its members, even if the outcomes are
negative, can go far toward mitigating the reactions of the members toward both a change and
the organization.

Interrelationship of the five components

An important point to understand is that each of the five components of the change
readiness message do not stand alone. Each component is interrelated with the others,
influencing or shaping the others. The components are additive in nature, as well, shaping both
the nature of the readiness for change message and organizational members’ readiness for
change.

Schweiger and DeNisi’s (1991) merger study provides a good example of the
interrelationship of the five components. For the plant given extensive information, the
employees received an announcement from the CEO about the merger. They received a merger
newsletter, and a telephone number was set up to provide additional information about the
merger. Meetings were held in departments to provide employees with face-to-face briefings and
answer questions about the merger. Thus, the employees received significant information from
management justifying the merger (discrepancy and appropriateness). As the information was
presented, plant employees were able to observe top and local management actively engaged in
presenting information about the merger, answering questions about the impact of the merger,
and endorsing the merger (principal support). Additionally, the employees were provided
information about any possible layoffs, about severance benefits, about integration plans in terms
of the two organizations coming together, and about how this would affect the role of the plant
and its employees in the newly merged organization (valence and efficacy). By presenting an
integrated message about the merger to the plant employees, employee readiness for the merger
was created. By contrast, a sister plant received minimal levels of information about the merger
(only the official announcement by the CEO). The response from these employees was so
negative, the study conducted by Schweiger and DeNisi had to be cut short before irreparable
harm was done. In the plant where management attempted to create readiness for the merger, employee commitment, job satisfaction and perceived organizational support for employees were considerably higher than in the second plant. Thus, taken as an integrated whole, the five components can serve to build readiness in the minds of organizational members for those change initiatives management seeks to implement. But, which components are best able to minimize or prevent those aspects of resistance to change?

**The change readiness matrix**

The contention is that certain readiness components are better suited for preventing or minimizing the likelihood of resistance to change. By arranging the five readiness components (Armenakis et al., 1999) with the list of resistance perceptions provided by Palmer et al. (2006) in a matrix form, the dynamic interaction between the components and perceptions can be seen (Table 2).

*Dislike of change.* Here lies the traditional argument for many managers and consultants: People dislike change. However, as Dent and Powley (2003) observed, not all change is perceived as bad by organizational members. A perceived dislike of change can lie within a context of efficacy and valence. Change that leaves an organizational member feeling vulnerable in terms of his or her ability to successfully take part in the change can trigger resistance towards the change. As Galpin (1996) noted, a lack of confidence in one’s ability to adapt to a particular change initiative can lead to resistance toward it. By communicating, management can create the belief among organizational members that the appropriate training and education will be provided (Principal Support and Efficacy), and that those receiving the training and education will benefit in terms of the ability to perform and take advantage of opportunities that may arise from implementation of the change initiative (Valence).

*Discomfort with uncertainty.* Most people dislike ambiguity or a sense of not being in control. The uncertainty can arise from a lack of information as to whether the chosen course of action is the right action or even needed, how others feel about the change, whether one has the knowledge, skills, or ability to be a successful part of the change, and uncertainty as to how one will be impacted by the proposed change initiative. Thus, the role of management is to clarify that the proposed change is both necessary (Discrepancy; Beer et al., 1990) and the best one to achieve the goals of the organization (Appropriateness; Beckhard & Harris, 1987). Additionally, by being visible to answer questions about the proposed change initiative not only involves application of the discrepancy and appropriateness components, it also demonstrates an application of the principal-support component (Covin & Kilmann, 1990). Uncertainty about whether or not one can successfully adapt to a change initiative is resolved through the efforts of management to provide the necessary training and education for organizational members to enable them to adapt to the change initiative (Efficacy; Galpin, 1996). Finally, the uncertainty can spring from concern about one’s future with the organization when a change initiative is implemented, one’s future relationship with coworkers, or whether or not there are desired benefits or pain associated with the change initiative (Valence; Judson, 1991; Kissler, 1991).

*Perceived negative effects on interests.* A perception that a change initiative will have a negative effect on one’s interest is clearly a valence issue. The negative effects can include a loss
of authority, status, rewards, an opportunity to do what one does best, relationships with coworkers, control or autonomy. As has been shown, actions taken by management to mitigate the impact of a change initiative on organizational members can have beneficial effects to the organization. As researchers such as Kissler (1991) and Klein (1984) observed, those changes negatively impacting organizational members, in whatever way, will not be positively received. Indeed, the nature of some change initiatives will mean that some negative outcomes can not be avoided. In these situations management is wise not to try to ignore or smooth over the negative outcomes.

Table 2. The readiness for change-resistance to change matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discrepancy</th>
<th>Appropriateness</th>
<th>Principal Support</th>
<th>Efficacy</th>
<th>Valence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dislike of Change</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discomfort w/ Uncertainty</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
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<td>Reactions to experience of</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>


impact. By addressing these issues in a straightforward manner and striving to make sure that the change initiative is implemented fairly, management may be able to ameliorate, to some extent, the reactions of those negatively affected (Brockner et al., 1994; Maurer, 1996; Moorman, 1991; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997).

**Attachment to the established culture.** The way we do things around here becomes the way we do things around here because that way has been reinforced through past success. Over time, policies, procedures, routines, the formal systems of the organization become entrenched because they have been successful. Over time, congruence among culture, structure, and formal systems has emerged and a set of values and norms are now in place. There is a perceived fit among all (Buller et al., 1985). Thus, a change initiative represents an assault on the very identity of the organization, and such a change might be the most difficult change to attempt. As a result, management must apply all of the components of the change-readiness message if it expects to implement a change initiative in such a situation. Cameron and Quinn (1999) provided a list of suggestions or strategies for management to follow in attempting to change a culture. The change readiness components fit within the strategies provided by Cameron and Quinn. For example, Cameron and Quinn proposed that management must explain why the change is necessary and that management creates readiness, which may be defined as showing the advantages of changing and the disadvantages of not changing. These both represent discrepancy. Explaining why and creating readiness (as they define it) may also apply to demonstrating the appropriateness of the change, but they also recommend that management identify small wins. Showing measured progress as the change progresses will build beliefs that the change is appropriate. Identifying small wins also is a key step in building efficacy in the organizational members. Small wins can also be a step toward satisfying valence concerns as people begin to see some benefit in the change by the wins they experience. Finally, Cameron and Quinn called on management to demonstrate social support. By that, they mean that management should build a coalition of supporters for the change. They specifically recommend identifying opinion leaders. This fits with the Armenakis et al. (1999) readiness component of principal support. By identifying and encouraging those supporters at all levels for the change, it becomes easier for other organizational members to join in making the change implementation successful.

**Perceived breach of the psychological contract.** Rousseau (1995) defined psychological contract as, “Beliefs that individuals hold regarding promises made, accepted, and relied on between themselves and another (employee, client, manager, organization)” (p. 9). Placing this definition within an exchange framework and couching it in normative terms, Rousseau argued that within a group or organizational setting it becomes a “…shared [sic] psychological contract that emerges when members of a social group (e.g., church group), organization (e.g., U.S. Army, Xerox, United Way), or work unit (e.g., the trauma team at a community hospital) hold common beliefs. Thus, over time, through the series of workplace exchanges (Cole, Schaninger,
organizational members believe that the organization has made a commitment to them, whether through an offering of employment, the manner in which they will be treated, the opportunities they will be provided; in general, the support they will be provided. Because of that perception of commitment held by organizational members, the members, in turn, commit to the organization in terms of loyalty, citizenship behaviors, performance, etc. The commitment is made because of the belief that each party is "bound to some future action..." (Rousseau, 1995, p. 23).

An organizational change may upset the contract between organization and member, because the implied agreement now comes into question. Isabella (1990) observed that when change is being implemented, possibly requiring new norms, understandings, and behaviors, for a period of time organizational members are experiencing double exposures or "interpretational portraits that contain images of before and after" (p. 23). Organizational members engage in comparing the current reality with what the new reality created by the change may be. This comparison of the two realities will be influenced not only by how previous change implementations were handled by management, but also, what symbolic message is management sending about the change initiative (Labianca, Gray, & Brass, 2000). As they compare the two realities, organizational members will look for violations of the implied agreement between management and organizational members. If the perception developed is that management has "gone back on its word," organizational members will react negatively toward the change initiative.

If there exists a perception that a change initiative involves a breach of the psychological contract, to minimize or ameliorate this perception, management must shape the readiness effort in terms of demonstrating to organizational members that while a change initiative might lead to an inadvertent breach (e.g., unexpected, negative impact on scheduling) or a disruption (e.g., involving a position the organization can no longer hold), it was not an intentional effort on the part of the organization to purposefully breech any implied understanding between it and the organizational members. Organizational members may believe that the change initiative is impacting their ability to perform their jobs. The actions taken by management would be efficacy and valence-based in intent. Thus, management would provide evidence that scheduling hardships would be temporary, or that additional training would be provided to learn new task-behaviors. For more serious disruptions which would, by definition, be permanent, while the readiness component of efficacy would still be critical (can I learn/perform my new job), the valence component of readiness would become critical in application. Since a disruption not only might include learning a new job, but facing relocation, having co-workers with whom the organizational member had long-standing relationships downsized, even personally experiencing downsizing, a more powerful effort to explain and justify the disruption would be required. Bies (1987) and Cobb, Wooten, and Folger (1995) provided four social accounts that can shape perceptions of the change initiative and its supposed fairness. For example, management may rely on a causal account, providing evidence that the change was necessary, an ideological account, describing a goal to be achieved ("If we do this, we will be a leader in our industry."), a referential account that if the change were not made, conditions would worsen; whereas, if the change were made, conditions would improve. Finally, management would rely on a penitential account, wherein management would acknowledge that the change initiative had caused hardships, make apologies, and attempt to demonstrate how management would ease that
hardship (e.g., in the event of a downsizing, severance packages would be provided for those members downsized).

*Lack of conviction that the change is needed.* As is sometimes said, “If it ain’t broke, don’t fix it.” Organizational members, who believe that organizational problems such as quality issues, competitive issues, or other performance-related issues are merely those that can be overcome by simply working harder or investing in a new advertising campaign, will believe that a new change initiative is really unnecessary. Thus, management must provide evidence to the contrary. By providing clear evidence that the organization can no longer continue on the path it is currently following (e.g., Galpin, 1996) and that the proposed change initiative represents a new path designed to enable it to better deal with those performance-related issues (e.g., Brown, Massey, Montoya-Weiss & Burkman, 2002), management would be able to demonstrate to organizational members that the change initiative was not *change-for-change-sake,* rather one that was necessary. Thus, management would be using the readiness components of discrepancy and appropriateness. Finally, application of the principal support and valence components is necessary. As Kissler (1991) and Judson (1991) both observed, when organizational members do not perceive a change as necessary or view the change as threatening the status of their relationship with the organization, they will not support it.

*Lack of clarity as to what is expected.* Palmer et al. (2006) placed this resistance perception in a strategy framework. While a strategy may be clear in its overall goals, what organizational members are supposed to do at the actual level at which the strategy is implemented is not clear. Organizational members may not be able to understand what is expected of them because of a lack of *fit* between the new strategy and the existing characteristics of the organization, for example, the “...degree of congruence between the change and organizational characteristics such as culture, structure, and formal systems . . .” (Buller et al., 1985, p. 193), or because of new skills that may be required. Thus, management may have to use the components of both appropriateness and efficacy, demonstrating not only that the change initiative fits the organization and its needs, but also that organizational members do have the capability to successfully implement the change (Galpin, 1996).

*Belief that the specific change being proposed is inappropriate.* Sufficient argument has been made about the application of the appropriateness component (e.g., Buller et al., 1995; Galpin, 1996; Kissler, 1991; Vollman, 1996) to demonstrate that the proposed change initiative is the correct one to successfully achieve the desired goal(s) of the organization. But, the efficacy component can, also, impact organizational members’ reaction to the change. First, the organizational members must believe they have the knowledge, skills, and ability to successfully implement the change. Without such a belief, the perception may be that the change initiative is inappropriate because it would not be successful since the organization did not have the capability to make it successful (e.g., Galpin, 1996; Vollman, 1996).

However, a critical point for management to understand is that a foundational element of the questioning of a proposed change element is that those objecting to a change on the grounds of its inappropriateness may have solid reasons for objecting. It may be that they hold a different vision for the organization, but it also may be that they are right to object as they have seen flaws in the proposed change initiative that were overlooked or not understood by management.
Thus, by conscientiously making the effort to demonstrate why the change initiative is appropriate, management, itself, may discover those flaws or create the opportunity for others to point them out.

**Belief that the timing is wrong.** Blount and Janicik (2001) observed that time is experienced, “through the occurrence of specific valued [sic] outcomes and events” (p. 567). Thus, time is valued by that which gives it value. As sociological and anthropological researchers (e.g., Fraisse, 1984, Gell, 1996) have noted, through the shared events of organizational life, organizational members are able to give their time value. Because their time comes to have value, they do not like it neither delayed, nor hastened (Blount & Janicik, 2001). Thus, changes impacting those valued routines and plans will be viewed negatively because time to deal with the change would be taken away from time devoted to routines and plans. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) note also that the perceived duration a change initiative will last and the uncertainty associated with it can lead to a negative view of the change initiative. These perceptions could lead to an argument of *not now* if the change would significantly disrupt those routines or plans. The more able organizational members perceive themselves to adapt to a change (accommodating it within existing schedules), the less likely they are to resist it (Barnett & Carroll, 1995). As such the components of efficacy and valence would be of significance here. By arguing that organizational members do have the capability to make the change or will be provided the education and training necessary to make the change, and the time to make the change resistance on the grounds of the change being disruptive could be minimized.

Additionally, management must be able to demonstrate some sort of positive benefit (valence) either short or long term that justifies the disruption that the change brings. As a result of the need to show positive valence, management must also be ready to demonstrate that this change initiative is not change for change sake, but rather, it is necessary (discrepancy) and the right change (appropriateness); support by influential people (to the organizational member) must also be shown. Principal support is important, because if those people who are important to the organizational members do not seem to share the urgency of management as it attempts to implement the change initiative, the organizational members will believe the change initiative was not as important as management presented and, therefore, could have waited. Also, belief that the timing is wrong gets directly at discrepancy, appropriateness, and valence because the short term impact on organizational members, suppliers, customers may be negative (Maurer, 1996). The belief is that if the organization waits, perhaps the change will (a) become unnecessary (discrepancy), (b) a better solution will become available (appropriateness), or (c) be less painful (valence).

**Excessive change.** Excessive change can be viewed as when more than one significant change is occurring simultaneously or when a new change is started before a current change has run its course (Stensaker et al., 2002). The perception of organizational members is that the different changes, because of their demand on the organization’s resources and the members’ time, may converge to form the *perfect storm* at the organizational members’ level. Such change overload can lead to *change fatigue* and *burnout*. Several researchers (Glick, Huber, Miller, Harold, & Sutcliffe, 1995; Monge, 1995; Rafferty & Griffin, 2006) posited that organizational members make judgments about whether change initiatives are occurring too frequently and, if so, may experience negative reactions towards the change(s). In an empirical study, Rafferty
and Griffin found that when organizational members do not consider management to have properly planned a change initiative, the members will possess a high degree of psychological uncertainty (or doubt about the merits or meaning of the change initiative). Rafferty and Griffin also found that the greater the amount of change perceived by organizational members (is there excessive change) the higher the level of uncertainty.

When the issue is perceived to be excessive change, management must make use of all five components of change readiness to assist organizational members in adapting to or accommodating the changes. Given multiple changes, organizational members will attempt to assess the necessity of these changes, whether or not the changes will accomplish what is stated by management, whether or not the organizational members, indeed, the organization as a whole, can accomplish the changes while continuing with the processes that enable them to accomplish their jobs, who is asking for and supporting the changes, and, finally, what the organizational members expect to gain from trying to juggle the different changes. Thus, management must, first, demonstrate that each change is not only necessary, but it is also necessary now (discrepancy). As Kotter (1995) noted, if the change initiative must, of necessity, happen immediately, then management must create a sense of urgency for it. However, where multiple changes are occurring, demonstrating that each is equally important is even more critical because, being asked to juggle multiple tasks, some of which may negatively interact with others, organizational members are going to feel uncertain and stressed. In this case, using Isabella’s (1990) concept of double exposures, organizational members will be comparing each change initiative against the other. If management inadvertently provides cues that a particular change initiative is not as important as another, effort in implementing this change will flag; resistance to continuing it may arise. This places a burden on management to be certain that a particular change is needed now.

Related to organizational-member evaluation of whether or not a change initiative is needed, is a related evaluation as to whether or not it is the correct change initiative (appropriateness) to resolve the discrepancy issue. Now, not only must the organizational members evaluate the necessity of the various change initiatives, but also whether or not the various solutions or change initiatives not only are the correct ones, but how they also impact the other change initiatives. Again, the concern is that combinations of change-related-factors interact with each other to create larger problems than existed in the first place. Here, observed Kotter (1996), management must put together a guiding coalition of people possessing position power, expertise, credibility, and leadership skills to guide the organization. Such a group has the capability not only to justify the need for multiple changes, but also, because of their expertise, they can provide assurance that the different change initiatives are proper. Finally, because of their expertise and credibility in the organization, they also demonstrate principal support for the various change initiatives. This coalition will also assure that management avoids inconsistent behaviors related to the change. Efficacy issues also must be dealt with where multiple-change issues are concerned. Organizational members will feel stressed because of the uncertainty created by so much change, believing there is not enough time to accomplish all that needs to be accomplished, that their coping abilities may be insufficient, and that management does not care about them (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006). Additionally, the level of stress caused by trying to manage so many change initiatives can only lead to a belief that there is no benefit to be had (efficacy), because, possibly, so many things are going wrong. During this time frame, as Bies
(1987) and Cobb et al. (1995) observed, management must rely heavily on penitential social accounts, acknowledging the difficulties experienced by organizational members and empathizing with them. The use of ideological accounts (making these changes successful will enable important goals to be achieved) to keep organizational members focused on the goals of the various change initiatives is equally important. By creating small wins (Kotter, 1996) management can demonstrate that progress is being made and the various sacrifices are worth it (efficacy and valence) and by the timely use of various rewards, both tangible and intangible, as recognition for the efforts of change members, positive valence can be built. It should be understood, however, that foisting multiple-change initiatives onto an organization suggests that management is lacking in a clear understanding of what it wants to accomplish and a clear strategy of how to achieve that. It is not enough to simply determine if a change is needed and if the proposed initiative will achieve what is desired. Management must make these determinations with the understanding and within the framework that the business of the organization does not stop while the change initiative is implemented. As such, management must recognize that it cannot change just one thing.

Cumulative effect of other changes in one’s life. It is easy to ignore or forget, not only that organizational members exist outside of the normal working hours of the organization, but also that what happens in an organizational member’s personal life impacts that member’s ability to function within the organization. Extraorganizational issues such as family, sociological status, even commuting time, for example, can be stressful factors in organizational members’ lives (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2007), impacting their workplace ability to cope with change. It is important that management not only recognize that these factors can impact organizational members’ ability to cope with a change initiative, but also, that the change initiative is impacting the organizational members’ extraorganizational life. During a time of change it can be useful for management to make sure that not only has it provided the education and training necessary to be successful in implementing a change initiative, but also that it has verbalized support (penitential social accounts) and provided such coping mechanisms as wellness programs and employ various tangible and intangible rewards to assist the organizational members (bonus or comp time off; gift certificates, etc.) gain balance in their lives. Such steps create feelings of efficacy and positive valence in the minds of employees because management is perceived to be supportive. This, in turn, enables organizational members to have a more positive focus toward the change initiative(s).

Perceived clash with ethics. As Piderit (2000) observed, one reason that organizational members might be reluctant to adopt a proposed change initiative is that the change initiative conflicts with the organizational members’ ethical principles. The resistance to the proposed change initiative arises as a result of change members’ perceiving that implementation of the change initiative would run counter to their ethical principles (Modigliani & Rochat, 1995). To say that the clash of the proposed change initiative clashes with organizational members’ ethical principles does not imply that management is attempting to do something illegal. For over a decade, organizational justice researchers have directed increased attention toward the relationship between justice and change, specifically through the focus on employee-fairness perceptions as they relate to organizational outcomes. As Cobb et al. (1995) found, how organizational members are treated when a change is implemented, as well as how the change is implemented, will influence organizational members’ perception of the fairness of the change
and whether or not they will resist it. Cobb et al. noted that perceptions of fair treatment result in a greater likelihood of endorsing a change, even when there may be negative outcomes from the change, such as downsizing. As a result, management must factor in how organizational members will perceive the change, not only in terms of its purpose to correct a discrepancy (appropriateness), but also organizational member perceptions of the fairness of the implementation of the change initiative in terms of outcomes for members (distributive justice), the processes by which the change initiative was implemented, and related decisions made that impact the members (procedural justice); finally, how members were treated (interactional justice) (Folger & Skarlicki, 1999). By first taking a human perspective of the change in terms of who will be impacted and how they will be impacted, rather than just a financial or performance perspective, management will be better prepared to educate organizational members that the proposed-change initiative is appropriate for the organization, including how organizational members are treated (appropriateness). Should there be negative outcomes associated with the proposed change initiative, by considering them in advance, management can prepare for these negative outcomes by creating means to make them more palatable. This effort can lead to perceptions by organizational members that the outcomes and processes were fairly derived and that any negatively impacted organizational members were treated fairly (valence).

Reaction to the experience of previous change. The history of previous changes in the organization will provide a lens through which the proposed change initiative is viewed. Past successes in implementing change will lead to perceptions of competent change leadership and confidence that the proposed change initiative will be successfully implemented (efficacy). However, a history of failed or half-heartedly implemented change will lead to skepticism on the part of organizational members (including many managers) that neither the organization nor its leaders are capable of implementing the change successfully (efficacy). A poor-past history of change efforts may, therefore, trigger resistance toward the change, including cynicism about both the change initiative and the organization’s leadership (Reichers et al., 1997). To minimize or prevent resistance perceptions arising from past failures to change, management must diligently work to demonstrate that the change initiative is both necessary (discrepancy) and the right change to accomplish the desired goals for the organization (appropriateness). At the same time management must communicate that it has confidence in the organizational members to successfully implement the change, stating a willingness to provide both the education and training necessary to make the implementation of the change initiative successful (efficacy). Benefits not only for the organization itself, but also for organizational members must be clarified (valence); however, if there will be some negative impact on organizational members such as downsizing, related to appropriateness, management must spend time demonstrating that this particular initiative is the best solution for dealing with the discrepant issue, but that the organization will act toward the organizational members in a fair and supportive manner as the change initiative is implemented (appropriateness and valence). The greatest difficulty in implementing a change initiative, if the past history is one of botched-change efforts, is to demonstrate principal support for the change. Those managers linked to those past-change failures will not possess credibility in the minds of the organizational members. As Kotter (1996) observed, a guiding coalition of change leaders, especially those possessing credibility with organizational members, will be the only way to gain acceptance for the proposed-change initiative (principal support).
Disagreement with the way the change is being managed. This particular resistance perception arises largely as the change initiative is already being implemented. Organizational members may accept management’s argument that a change is necessary if the organization is to improve its performance or survive some crisis. The organizational members may accept management’s argument that the proposed change initiative is the most appropriate means by which the desired improvement in performance or overcoming of the crisis will be achieved. They may, however, suspend judgment, taking a wait-and-see stance if past change efforts were not well managed. Thus, demonstrating to organizational members that the proposed change initiative is the appropriate means by which the desired goals are achieved is critical, because a wait-and-see attitude is, in itself, a form of resistance.

Again, using Isabella’s (1990) double-exposure concept, organizational members will weigh the proposed change initiative not only against the current circumstances in the organization and against past change outcomes, but also against an ideal change. If they perceive that this proposed change initiative is also failing (as past changes), or failing (when past changes were successful), or not as promised by management, resistance will be triggered. It becomes imperative that management not only demonstrate that the change initiative is the right one to implement (appropriateness), but that management and the organization are capable of making the change (efficacy). Additionally, especially if, in the initial stages of implementing the change initiative, organizational members experience negative outcomes, management must rely on ideological, referential, and penitential accounts (Bies, 1987; Cobb et al., 1995) to acknowledge the difficulties being experienced, thus, strengthening the resolve of organizational members to see the change through (valence). This effort, however, demonstrates the importance of management credibility in implementing change. If the organizational members’ perceptions of management are that management lacks credibility, the organizational members will not trust management to guide them through the change initiative implementation.

CONCLUSION

Piderit (2000) commented that, “Rarely do individuals form resistant attitudes, or express such attitudes in acts of dissent or protest, without considering the potential negative consequences for themselves” (p. 784). Piderit went on to conclude, “...what some may perceive as disrespectful or unfounded opposition might also be motivated by individuals’ ethical principles, or by their desire to protect the organization’s best interest” (p. 785). Management should never assume that the reason resistance to a particular change initiative is occurring is because people don’t like change. Management should, therefore, carefully consider any actions that are perceived to be resistant toward the proposed change initiative, because the actions may well be grounded in the reality that the change initiative either is the wrong initiative altogether, or is flawed in some way. However, just because there is no overt resistance to the change initiative, management never should assume that it has crafted the perfect change initiative because it takes an act of courage to verbalize opposition to a change initiative that might be carrying the endorsement of the highest levels of management.

The five elements of the change message for creating readiness for change (discrepancy, appropriateness, principle support, efficacy, and valence) as proposed by Armenakis et al. (1999) provide management with a means by which readiness for a change initiative is created, leading
to the embracement of or adoption of the proposed change initiative, rather than the rise of resistance to the change initiative. By a careful consideration of whether or not the change is necessary to move the organization from a current state to a desired state, whether or not the proposed change initiative is the best means to reach the desired state, whether or not a guiding coalition of support for the change is in place, whether or not both management and the organizational members have the knowledge, skills, and ability to successfully implement the change initiative, and, finally, whether or not there is a perception that some positive benefit will be derived from the implementation of the change initiative, whether in the short term or long term, management will have crafted a change initiative that can readily be embraced by the organizational members, not resisted. By managing the creation of readiness effort across all stages of the change initiative implementation, and not just at the beginning, the likelihood of success will be significant.
REFERENCES


