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Individual Readiness for Organizational Change and Its Implications for Human Resource and Organization Development

Myungweon Choi[1] and Wendy E. A. Ruona[1]

Abstract

Individual readiness for organizational change reflects the concept of *unfreezing* proposed by Lewin (1947/1997b) and is critical to successful change implementation. Understanding the conditions conducive to individual readiness for organizational change, instead of the more traditional focus on resistance to change, can be useful for designing and implementing effective human resource and organization development (HROD) interventions. In this conceptual article, we examine the concept of individual readiness for organizational change as well as its relationship to change strategies and organizational culture. A review of literature on change strategies and a learning culture suggests that individuals are more likely to have higher levels of readiness for organizational change when (a) they experience normative-reeducative change strategies and when (b) they perceive their work environment to have the characteristics associated with a learning culture.

Keywords

individual readiness for organizational change, change strategy, learning culture

One of the features that characterize contemporary organizations is change. Generally, change is the way people talk about an event in which something appears to become, or turn into, something else, where the something else is seen as a result or outcome (Ford & Ford, 1994). In reference to organizations, change is defined somewhat differently

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depending on the perspectives researchers take (Beer & Nohria, 2000b; Quinn, Kahn, & Mandl, 1994). For example, researchers with the strategic management perspective regard organizational change as a process of implementing corporate strategy made by organizational leaders and decision makers (Child, 1972; Dunphy, 2000). On the other hand, those who take the organizational development (OD) perspective regard change as intentional efforts to make differences in the organizational work setting for the purpose of enhancing individual development and improving organizational performance (Porras & Robertson, 1992). These two perspectives are the most fundamental ones in the organizational change literature (Beer & Nohria, 2000a, 2000b).

Although the types or modes of change may be different (Burke, 2008; Van de Ven & Poole, 1995; Weick & Quinn, 1999), it is now commonly accepted that all organizations are under the influence of multiple changes. Furthermore, current scholars, especially the proponents of complexity theories, have begun to view change as a condition of possibility for organizations (S. L. Brown & Eisenhardt, 1997; Burnes, 2004a; Stacey, Griffin, & Shaw, 2002; Styhre, 2002; Tetenbaum, 1998). According to these scholars, change is not "an exceptional effect, produced only under specific circumstances by certain people" (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 569). Rather, change is inherent in human action and necessarily occurs in a context of human social interactions (Ford & Ford, 1995). Considering that organizations are sites of continuously evolving human action, it is no exaggeration to say that change is "ontologically prior to organization" (Tsoukas & Chia, 2002, p. 570). If we agree with this argument, we must conclude that organizations are in a continuous state of change and, to survive, they must develop the ability to continuously change themselves incrementally and, in many cases, in a fundamental manner (Burnes, 2004b).

Organizational leaders are thus continually charged with introducing and implementing various initiatives to change their organizations. However, in reality, many change efforts do not result in their intended aims and do not foster sustained change. Specifically, researchers like Burke and Biggart (1997) and Beer and Nohria (2000a, 2000b) estimated that about two thirds of change projects fail, and Burnes (2004c) suggested that the failure rate may be even higher. The cause of many organizations' inability to achieve the intended aims of their change efforts is often considered as an implementation failure, rather than flaws innate in the change initiative itself (K. J. Klein & Sorra, 1996). In particular, the failures are often attributed to the organization's inability to provide for an effective *unfreezing* process (Lewin, 1947/1997b) before attempting a change induction (Kotter, 1995, 1996; Schein, 1987, 1999b). Unfreezing in the context of organizational change includes the process by which organizational members' beliefs and attitudes about a change are altered so that they perceive the changes as both necessary and likely to be successful. Generally, most organizational change models acknowledge the importance of the unfreezing step through such phases as building momentum, warm-up or defrosting activities, or gaining buy-in to the change effort (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993; Kotter, 1996; Schein, 1987, 1999a).

In this conceptual article, we focus on individuals' readiness for organizational change, which is grounded in the concept of unfreezing, elaborated by Kurt Lewin (Armenakis et al., 1993; Eby, Adams, Russell, & Gaby, 2000). Based on the
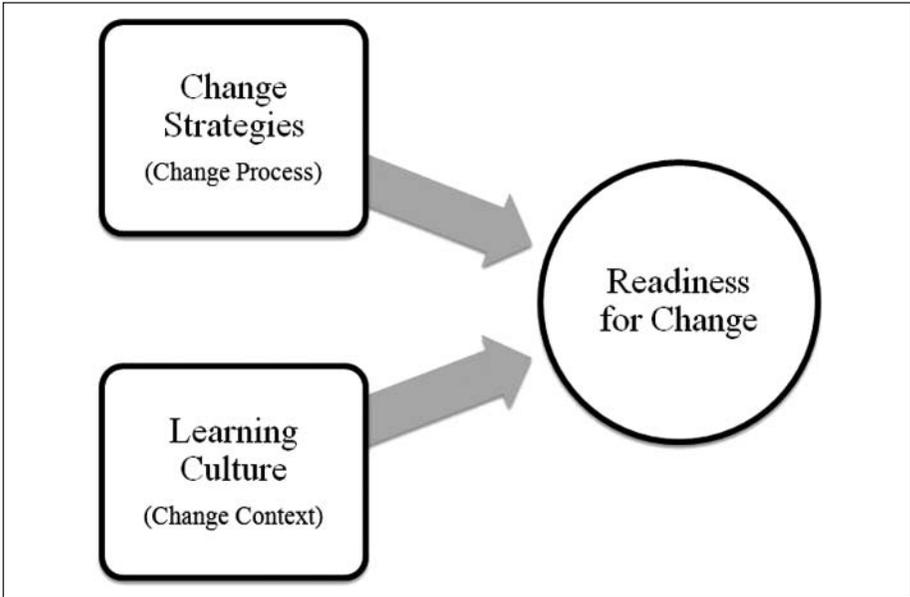
Figure 1. Scope of the article

understanding of the concept of readiness for change, we suggest propositions about the conditions under which individuals are likely to have higher levels of readiness for organizational change. In examining these conditions, we situate our discussion in the tradition of OD, which focuses on bringing about planned organizational change. Under the OD perspective, planned change is defined as a "conscious, deliberate, and intended" (Chin & Benne, 1985, p. 22) decision to enhance individual development and to increase an organization's effectiveness and capability (Cummings & Worley, 2005; Porras & Robertson, 1992). The OD perspective is appropriate to address individuals' reactions to change (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999) since it is more micro and internal than other perspectives such as resource dependence theory and population ecology (Quinn et al., 1994) and focuses on change in individual members' on-the-job behaviors (Porras & Robertson, 1992). In this article, we focus on two key features of OD as the conditions conducive to fostering individual readiness for organizational change: (a) OD approaches to change implementation that are based on the normative-reeducative change strategy (Chin & Benne, 1985) and (b) OD approaches as an ongoing organizational effort to enhance organizational health and capability through fostering the learning culture (Watkins & Golembiewski, 1995). Figure 1 represents the scope of this conceptual article.

It is hoped that this conceptual article will help both researchers and practitioners engaged in facilitating change (a) more clearly understand the concept of individual readiness for organizational change, (b) differentiate it from the construct of resistance to change, and (c) explore evidence-based literature on the conditions that most foster readiness for change.

Role of Individuals in Organizational Change

In the organizational change literature published during the 1990s, Armenakis and Bedeian (1999) identified four major themes: change content, change context, change process, and change criterion issues. As they explained, changes at the organizational level have often been considered with a macro, systems-oriented focus (Judge, Thoresen, Pucik, & Welbourne, 1999). However, at the same time, a number of researchers have also adopted a micro-level perspective on change and have put more emphasis on the role of individuals in implementing changes (Armenakis et al., 1993; George & Jones, 2001; Greenhalgh, Robert, Macfarlane, Bate, & Kyriakidou, 2004; Hall & Hord, 1987; Isabella, 1990; Lau & Woodman, 1995; Porras & Robertson, 1992; Tetenbaum, 1998). The main idea underlying this approach is that "change in the individual organizational member's behavior is at the core of organizational change" (Porras & Robertson, 1992, p. 724). According to the researchers, organizations only change and act through their members, and successful change will persist over the long term only when individuals alter their on-the-job behaviors in appropriate ways (George & Jones, 2001; Porras & Robertson, 1992). They also argue that many change efforts fail because change leaders often underestimate the central role individuals play in the change process.

To support the idea, these researchers have empirically demonstrated that individuals are not passive recipients of organizational change but actors who actively interpret and respond to what is happening in their environments (Greenhalgh et al., 2004; Hall & Hord, 1987; Isabella, 1990; Lowstedt, 1993). For example, based on in-depth interviews within an organization going through a change, Isabella (1990) showed that organizational members construe key events linked to the process of change as unfolding in four distinctive stages: anticipation, confirmation, culmination, and aftermath. Similarly, Hall and Hord (1987) and Rogers (1983, 2003) showed that, when faced with a change, people develop concerns of varying intensity or make decisions concerning its adoption across stages at different points in the change process. As this line of research has shown, individuals make assumptions about change processes, evaluate them, find meaning in them, and develop feelings about them.

Furthermore, some recent research studies have also shown that individuals' attitudes toward a change initiative influence their behavioral support for it (Cunningham et al., 2002; Jones, Jimmieson, & Griffiths, 2005; J. P. Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, & Topolnytsky, 2007; Weeks, Roberts, Chonko, & Jones, 2004). For example, by using a temporal research design, Jones et al.'s (2005) study showed that the individuals who had demonstrated a higher level of readiness in the early stage of a change implementation were more likely to change their behaviors to support the change initiative in the postimplementation stage. Similarly, Meyer, Srinivas, Lal, and Topolnytsky (2007) showed that individuals' normative and affective commitment to change were positively related to supportive behaviors such as cooperation and championing. The findings show that individuals' attitudes toward organizational change have real impact on change implementation and, therefore, are certainly critical for any change initiatives to be successful.

Understanding Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

Traditionally, individuals' attitudes toward organizational change have often been conceptualized as resistance to change. In this section, based on a critical review of the traditional view, we propose the use of another construct, individual readiness for organizational change, and discuss its implications for organizational change research.

Resistance to Change: Is It a Valid Concept?

Individuals' attitudes toward organizational change are usually regarded as synonymous with resistance to change, which has long been recognized as a barrier to organizational change attempts (Dent & Goldberg, 1999a; Jermier, Knights, & Nord, 1994). However, some researchers have begun to criticize the prevalent view on resistance and present a more multifaceted perspective on individuals' attitudes toward organizational change. For example, some researchers have argued that individuals are not naturally resistant to change—rather, they resist the imposition of change, or the way change is imposed to them (Fuegen & Brehm, 2004; Knowles & Linn, 2004). In this respect, individuals' negative reactions to change are not necessarily dysfunctional obstacles or liabilities to successful change. Rather, they may serve as the legitimate source of information regarding the implementation of change (Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008; D. Klein, 1985; Knowles & Linn, 2004; Piderit, 2000; Waddell & Sohal, 1998). Furthermore, researchers with a social constructionist viewpoint even contend that change agents create resistance by expecting resistance. According to them, change agents' expectations predispose them to look for resistance and to make sense of others' actions in such a way to confirm their expectation. In this way, change agents sustain the received truth that individuals resist change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999a; Ford et al., 2008; Ford, Ford, & McNamara, 2002; Gioia, Thomas, Clark, & Chittipeddi, 1994).

Kurt Lewin's (1947/1997b) idea of resistance is helpful for us to reevaluate the common use of the concept of resistance to change. Lewin conceived resistance as a restraining force moving in the direction of maintaining the status quo. In this respect, his conception of resistance is a systemic phenomenon rather than an individual predisposition. However, since Lewin's seminal conceptualization, resistance has come to be seen largely as a psychological phenomenon. It is regarded as something located "over there" in individuals and is often used to blame them for the unsatisfactory results of change efforts (Dent & Goldberg, 1999a, 1999b; Ford et al., 2002, 2008; Krantz, 1999; Maurer, 2006). As Piderit (2000) notes, by simply labeling their response as resistance, researchers and practitioners can easily dismiss potentially valid individual concerns about a proposed change. Therefore, it is important for us to shift our attention from individuals to the overall system of change and to develop a more valid conceptualization of individuals' attitudes toward change.

An Alternative Approach—Focusing on Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

While the tenets of resistance to change have been challenged, some researchers have begun stressing the notion of individual readiness for organizational change. Initially, studies on individual readiness for change were published in health, psychology, and medical literature (e.g., Block & Keller, 1998; Joe, Simpson, & Broome, 1998; Morera et al., 1998; Prochaska, Redding, & Evers, 1997). These studies typically focus on ceasing harmful health behaviors such as smoking and drug abuse and/or starting positive ones like exercise, weight management, and nutritional meals. Individual readiness for change in this context is concerned with the extent to which an individual perceives a change as needed and whether he or she has the capacity for it.

On the other hand, when the concept of individual readiness is applied to the organizational settings, it requires a consideration of the organizational context (Jansen, 2000). Organizational change is a situation that interrupts the normal patterns of an organization. In the situation, to make sense of the new environment and to draw conclusions about its possible outcomes, individuals are actively involved in information seeking, meaning ascription, and assumption making about the change process (Ford et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 1994; Rogers, 2003). As a result, individuals form assumptions, expectations, and impressions about the change, which comprise individual readiness for organizational change.

As Table 1 shows, researchers have defined individual readiness for organizational change in slightly different ways. For example, Armenakis et al. (1993) and Jansen (2000) defined the concept in terms of the necessity of a specific change initiative and the organizational capacity to implement it successfully. On the other hand, Jones et al. (2005) also emphasized employees' belief in the benefits from the change. Nevertheless, the researchers all agree that individual readiness for organizational change involves an individual's evaluation about the individual and organizational capacity for making a successful change, the need for a change, and the benefits the organization and its members may gain from a change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Eby et al., 2000; Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007; Jansen, 2000). Recently, Holt et al. (2007) more clearly defined the concept as a multifaceted construct with four dimensions: individuals' belief in the change-specific efficacy, appropriateness of the change, management support for the change, and personal benefit of the change.

The definitions summarized in Table 1 clearly show that individual readiness for organizational change is distinguished from organizational readiness for change, defined and assessed in terms of an organization's key infrastructure. For example, Preskill and Torres (1999a, 1999b, 2001) defined organizational readiness in terms of key elements of organizational infrastructure—culture, leadership, communication, and systems and structures—and argued that these elements form the foundation based on which efforts for organizational learning can be undertaken and sustained. As Preskill and Torres elaborated, the concept of organizational readiness focuses on organizational infrastructure. Similarly, individuals' evaluation concerning how organizational

Table 1. Definitions of Readiness for Change

Author(s)	Term	Definition
Armenakis et al. (1993)	Readiness for organizational change	Organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and intentions regarding the extent to which changes are needed and the organization's capacity to successfully make those changes. The cognitive precursor to the behaviors of either resistance to, or support for, a change effort
Eby et al. (2000)	Employees' perceptions of the organization's readiness for change	An individual's perception of the extent to which the organization is perceived to be ready to take on large-scale change
Jansen (2000)	Readiness for change	An organization's capacity for making change and the extent to which individuals perceive the change as needed
Jones et al. (2005)	Employees' perception of readiness for change	The extent to which employees hold positive views about the need for organizational change as well as the extent to which employees believe that such changes are likely to have positive implications for themselves and the wider organization
Holt et al. (2007)	Readiness for organizational change	Employees' beliefs that (a) they are capable of implementing a proposed change (i.e., change self-efficacy), (b) the proposed change is appropriate for the organization (i.e., appropriateness), (c) the leaders are committed to the proposed change (i.e., management support), and (d) the proposed change is beneficial to organizational members (i.e., personal valence)

infrastructure can facilitate and sustain organizational change efforts is a key component of individual readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Eby et al., 2000; Holt et al., 2007; Jansen, 2000). In addition, other individual-level concerns, including the change-specific efficacy and personal benefit of the change (Holt et al., 2007; Jones et al., 2005), are critical for individuals to be ready for a specific organizational change initiative.

As discussed thus far, the use of the construct of individual readiness for organizational change gives us advantages over the common use of resistance to change. Oftentimes, resistance to change is viewed as "a reactive process where agents embedded in power relations actively oppose initiatives by other agents" (Jermier et al., 1994, p. 9). By using the term, leaders and change agents commonly fail to notice the

potentially positive intentions that may motivate negative responses to change. On the other hand, the concept of readiness for change assumes that individuals' concerns over change are natural and there must be reasons for the concerns. Furthermore, it is also assumed that change can be more successful if the concerns of change recipients are considered. Therefore, the concept of readiness for change helps us pay attention to the situational causes of such concerns—for example, individuals' evaluation of management support for and organizational capability to cope with a specific change initiative (Eby et al., 2000; Holt et al., 2007). In this regard, readiness for change is a more valid and practical concept to understand employees' attitudes toward organizational change than resistance to change.

The importance and relevance of individual readiness in the context of organizational change are supported in the previous literature. As researchers have noted, the definitions of individual readiness for organizational change are conceptually similar to Lewin's (1947/1997b) notion of the unfreezing step (Armenakis et al., 1993; Eby et al., 2000). The unfreezing step in the organizational change context includes the process by which organizational members' attitudes about a change initiative are altered in a way that they perceive the change as necessary and likely to be successful. In this respect, when individuals become ready for a change initiative, this indicates that the unfreezing step has been successful. Rogers (1983, 2003) also endorsed the importance of readiness for change through the innovation-decision process model. According to the model, individuals develop a favorable or unfavorable attitude toward an innovation in the persuasion stage based on the prior conditions (previous practice, felt needs/problems, innovativeness, norms of the social systems) and the knowledge they gained through the previous stage (knowledge stage). Rogers emphasized that individuals' attitudes toward an innovation developed in the persuasion stage, which includes their readiness for change, will affect the decision, implementation, and confirmation of the adoption of an innovation. Furthermore, in the concern-based adoption model, Hall and Hord (1987) also dealt with the core ideas of individual readiness for organizational change. The main premise underlying their model is that a change initiative can be more successful if the concerns of those affected by it are considered. Concerns in their model are defined as "the composite representation of the feelings, preoccupation, thought, and consideration given to a particular issue or task" (Hall & Hord, 1987, p. 59) and develop through the stages including awareness, informational, personal, and consequence. These stages of concerns in Hall and Hord's model are similar to the components of the concept of individual readiness for change summarized in Table 1.

In sum, while the basic assumptions of resistance to change have been challenged (e.g., Ford et al., 2002, 2008), the concept of individual readiness for change—a multifaceted construct composed of individuals' belief in the change-specific efficacy, appropriateness of the change, management support for the change, and personal benefit of the change (Holt et al., 2007)—has gained recognition among researchers. Based on the understanding of the concept of individual readiness for change, the following sections discuss its relationship to the two key dimensions of organizational change (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991)—change strategies and organizational culture.

Change Strategies and Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

OD researchers have long been interested in *theories of changing* (Bennis, 1966), which explains what must be done, and in what general order, to trigger changes in organizations. Some of them specifically focus on broad strategies for implementing change and provide general guidance for change activities (e.g., Beer & Nohria, 2000a, 2000b; Chin & Benne, 1985; Hornstein, Bunker, Burke, Gindes, & Lewicki, 1971; Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008; Rajagopalan & Spreitzer, 1997). They provide methods for categorizing approaches to change or activities that change agents might use to bring about change (Porras & Robertson, 1992). Among this line of work, Chin and Benne's (1985) framework, first published in 1961, is considered as the most comprehensive and integrative, providing grounds for understanding approaches to change or change activities (Burke, 2008; Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008; Szabla, 2007). In this section, based on this understanding of change strategies, we suggest a proposition about the relationship between individuals' experience of change strategies and their readiness for organizational change.

Change Strategies in Organizations: Chin and Benne's Typology

Based on the sociological and psychological roots of strategies of planned change, Chin and Benne (1985) classified change strategies into three categories: empirical-rational strategies, power-coercive strategies, and normative-reeducative strategies. The three groups of change strategies represent different assumptions about why and how changes should be made.

Empirical-rational strategies. The fundamental assumptions underlying empirical-rational change strategies are that people are rational and that they will follow their rational self-interest once it is revealed to them. Therefore, under these assumptions an organization member will adopt a proposed change if it can be rationally justified and if it can be shown that he or she will gain by the change (Chin & Benne, 1985). Also, as ignorance is assumed to block change, scientific investigation, research, and education to disseminate knowledge are regarded as the chief ways of facilitating changes. While there are variations in this group of strategies, typically experts, either internal or external to the client system, are contracted to analyze the system with the goal of making it more efficient. Change agents, often aided by experts, try to modify change recipients' behaviors with reason and logic.

Normative-reeducative strategies. Like empirical-rational strategies, normative-reeducative strategies assume that people are rationally self-interested. However, at the same time, these strategies also assume that people are inherently social—they conform to and are committed to socially funded and communicated meanings, norms, and institutions (Chin & Benne, 1985). Therefore, if organizational changes are to occur, individual members not only need to undergo rational informational processing but

also should reconsider their attitudes, values, normative orientations, institutionalized roles and relationships, and cognitive and perceptual orientations (Chin & Benne, 1985; Preskill & Torres, 1999a; Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008). As changes in these noncognitive determinants of behavior need to be exercised through mutual persuasion within collaborative relationships, change processes required in this group of strategies are fundamentally different from transmitting information or exercising force. Under this view, as Lewin (1947/1997b) emphasized, change occurs only when individuals participate in their own reeducation (Chin & Benne, 1985). In addition, the proponents of normative-reeducative strategies also assume that participation is essential for building the partnership, trust, and commitment, which are thought to be vital for long-term performance improvements (Bennis, 2000). Normative-reeducative strategies have the following features in common (Chin & Benne, 1985): (a) They all emphasize the client system and its involvement in the change process; (b) The problem confronting the client system is assumed to lie in the attitudes, values, norms, and the external and internal relationships, rather than to be one that can be met by more adequate technical information; (c) Nonconscious elements that impede problem resolution must be brought into consciousness and publicly examined and reconstructed; and (d) The methods and concepts of the behavioral sciences are resources that change agents and clients use to deal with problems. The main strategies of this group include (a) improving the problem-solving capabilities of a system and (b) fostering growth in the persons who make up the system to be changed (Chin & Benne, 1985). As noted by researchers, OD is the major representation of this group of strategies (Burke, 2008; Burnes, 2004b).

Power-coercive strategies. Power is an ingredient of all strategies. What differentiates strategies is the degree of power on which each strategy depends and the ways each strategy generates and applies power in the process of effecting changes. Specifically, rational-empirical strategies depend on knowledge as a major ingredient of power and regard people with knowledge as legitimate and primary sources of power. Similarly, normative-reeducative strategies also admit the importance of knowledge as a source of power, though they tend to redress the imbalance between different types of knowledge used in effecting changes (Chin & Benne, 1985). On the other hand, power-coercive strategies are characterized by their emphasis on political and economic sanctions for lack of compliance with a proposed change or on utilization of moral power playing on sentiments of guilt and shame (Chin & Benne, 1985). Under this group of strategies, with coercion that ranges from subtle manipulation to the direct use of physical force, more powerful people within an organizational hierarchy impose their will on the less powerful to exact their compliance.

Application of change strategies. Table 2 shows the examples of each group of change strategies proposed by Chin and Benne (1985) and other researchers. In reality, change implementations in organizations are typically a combination of these strategies. However, one strategy/approach usually dominates and affects how the other strategy(ies) are implemented and/or whether the secondary or tertiary strategies are experienced as they are intended.

Table 2. Examples of Strategies of Each Group in Chin and Benne's (1985) Typology

	Characteristics according to Chin and Benne (1985)	Other examples
Empirical-rational strategies	• Dissemination of knowledge through general education • Personnel selection and replacement • Employing systems analysts as consultants	Persuasion with reasoning (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977), negotiation (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), exchange (Falbe & Yukl, 1992), presenting the benefits of change (Nutt, 1996), rational appeals of experts (Nutt, 1998; Yukl & Falbe, 1990), engineering intervention (Huy, 2001), education and communication (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), telling strategy (Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008)
Power-coercive strategies	• Use of political institutions • Manipulation of power elites	Unilateral action (Greiner, 1967; Waldersee & Griffiths, 2004), power (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977), authoritative direction and coercion (Dunphy & Stace, 1988; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), pressure (Yukl & Falbe, 1990), manipulation and co-optation/coalition (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979), edict (Nutt, 1998), hard approach (Beer & Nohria, 2000a), commanding (Huy, 2001), forcing strategy (Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008)
Normative-reeducative strategies	• Improving the problem-solving capabilities of a system • Fostering growth in the persons who make up the system to be changed	Delegated authority (Greiner, 1967), involvement of target (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Zaltman & Duncan, 1977), collaboration (Dunphy & Stace, 1988), inspirational appeals (Falbe & Yukl, 1992; Yukl & Falbe, 1990), soft approach (Beer & Nohria, 2000a), teaching (Huy, 2001), shared methods (Powell & Posner, 1980; Waldersee & Griffiths, 2004), participating strategy (Kotter & Schlesinger, 1979; Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008)

Approaches to change in the strategic management literature view organizational change as a process of implementing corporate strategy (Dunphy, 2000) and are primarily based on power-coercive and rational-empirical strategies. Accordingly, CEOs and the top executive team are seen to have the perspective, knowledge, and power to reposition the organization strategically to take advantage of its dynamic environment.

On the contrary, other individuals are seen as a potential source of error, inadequacy, and special interest pleading (Conger, 2000; Dunphy, 2000). Therefore, to ensure that a change initiative generated by the top team is not subverted, it is vital that other organizational members "faithfully carry out the initiatives generated from the top of the organization" (Dunphy, 2000, p. 126). Consequently, the change process is driven by a small group of people with the leadership roles, and they must apply directive and coercive actions to force change recipients to comply with the proposed change goals (Huy, 2001).

On the other hand, in OD approaches to change, the aims of organizational change efforts are regarded as a deliberate decision to increase an organization's effectiveness and capability to change itself (Cummings & Worley, 2005). In this perspective, the process of change emphasizes obtaining feedback, reflecting on the feedback, and making further changes; moreover, organizational change initiatives primarily take participative and emergent forms. In addition, employee participation is regarded as a key source of energy for change (Burnes, 2004b; Dunphy, 2000; Sashkin, 1986). The change process in OD approaches is mainly based on normative-reeducative strategies (Burke, 2008; Chin & Benne, 1985; Huy, 2001).

Comparing the Influence of Change Strategies on Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

As researchers with a social constructionist viewpoint contend, when faced with organizational change, individuals are actively involved in information seeking, meaning ascription, and assumption making about the change process to make sense of the new environment and to draw conclusions about its possible outcomes (Ford et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 1994). This includes extracting particular behaviors and communications specific to the organizational change out of streams of ongoing events, interpreting them, and acting on the resulting interpretation (Ford et al., 2008). In this respect, the change strategies used by leaders or agents of an organization are critical in change recipients' sensemaking (Weick, 1995) as well as the development of their readiness for organizational change. Which group of strategies, then, is the most effective in fostering readiness for change?

Normative-reeducative vs. power-coercive strategies. During organizational change, individuals are required to reconsider their beliefs, values, and normative orientations to make sense of the new environment (Ford et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 1994; Preskill & Torres, 1999a). Changes in these noncognitive determinants of behavior need reeducation (Lewin, 1946/1997a) so that patterns of thinking and acting that are presently well established can change. As Lewin (1946/1997a) emphasized, reeducation is not possible through coercion or pressure and must be distinguished from conformity.

One of the biggest differences between normative-reeducative strategies and power-coercive strategies is that the former focuses on commitment and the latter focuses on conformity. Under power-coercive strategies, change recipients are forced to comply with the goals and, as a response, may conform to the direction without reflecting on

their beliefs and values (Huy, 2001; Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008). On the other hand, under normative-reeducative strategies, all organizational members are given occasions for participation in decision-making process, thereby having a choice to contribute by offering an opinion and potentially to shape it (Anderson, 2009). For example, in the action research model, which reflects the core idea of normative-reeducative strategies, those affected by problems must be actively involved in diagnosing, action planning, action taking, and evaluating the effects of action. Through the experiences, individuals have more control and autonomy over their work (Skelley, 1989), achieve personal fulfillment through membership (Anderson, 2009), come to fully understand their situation (Burnes, 2004b), and contribute to generation and dissemination of new knowledge (Freedman, 2006). Furthermore, these experiences also help individuals have high levels of emotional investment in and commitment to supporting planned change (Beckhard, 1969; Wooten & White, 1999). Under these conditions, individuals have the potential to view the change as necessary and valuable and/or to provide feedback to the organizational system about the change in ways that can enhance the change implementation. This fosters the meaningful engagement of individuals and their commitment to and support for the change at an intellectual and emotional level (Freedman, 2006; Huy, 2001; Porras & Robertson, 1992). As discussed above, individual perception of the necessity and value of a change is significant aspects of readiness for change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Eby et al., 2000; Jansen, 2000) and can facilitate the adoption of the change (Rogers, 2003). In this respect, it can be argued that normative-reeducative change strategies are more effective than power-coercive strategies in fostering readiness for change.

Normative-reeducative vs. empirical-rational strategies. Some researchers have shown that empirical-rational strategies may not work well in implementing organizational change (e.g., Barett, Thomas, & Hocevar, 1995; Ford et al., 2002; Green, 2004; Lyytinen & Damsgaard, 2001; Orlikowski & Hofman, 1997) and can be less effective than normative-reeducative strategies in fostering individual readiness for organizational change. Through a review of more than 4,000 studies on diffusion of innovations, Rogers (1983, 2003) explained how an individual's predisposition—such as interests, needs, and existing attitudes—influences the effects of knowledge concerning an innovation. According to him, individuals have tendencies to attend to communication messages that are consistent with one's existing attitudes and beliefs (i.e., selective exposure) and to interpret communication messages in terms of one's existing attitudes and beliefs (i.e., selective perception). Due to these tendencies, even if an individual is exposed to new knowledge concerning an innovation, such exposure will have little effect on them unless the innovation is perceived as relevant to their needs and as consistent with the individual's attitudes and beliefs (Hassinger, 1959; Rogers, 2003). Therefore, empirical-rational strategies may not work without normative-reeducative efforts to alter change recipients' beliefs, values, and attitudes.

Furthermore, the researchers with a constructionist viewpoint (and who would align with the normative-reeducative approaches) contend that the diffusion of new practices depends more on the change recipients' beliefs in the benefits of the new practices,

rather than the actual benefits, and that the beliefs are shaped and promoted by the interaction between change agents and change recipients (Barett et al., 1995; Ford et al., 2002, 2008; Green, 2004). In other words, the individuals' adoption of any change or innovation depends more on the interaction between change agents and change recipients than on the objective merits of ideas and products themselves.

Change models with the normative-reeducative orientation engage change recipients in a mutual process with change agents and provide each group (or multiple groups) with opportunities to examine and reshape their present attitudes and values (Quinn & Sonenshein, 2008; Weick, 2000). For example, in action research, those affected by change are assumed to know the subtle characteristics of the situation, which enable or hinder effective implementation of a plan (Dickens & Watkins, 2006), and are involved throughout the reiterative cyclical process. Through the experiences of colearning and cocreation, individuals gain the competencies needed to apply action research method and become able to plan and take effective action for and by themselves in the future; thus they become increasingly self-reliant and less dependent on experts, consultants, or authority structures (Freedman, 2006). In addition, by facilitating the interaction between change agents and recipients, normative-reeducative strategies provide more opportunities for change recipients to develop the knowledge they need to believe in the benefits of a change (Freedman, 2006), which can facilitate the adoption of the change (Ford et al., 2008; Green, 2004; Rogers, 2003). As discussed above, change recipients' change self-efficacy and their belief in the benefits of a change are significant components of individual readiness for organizational change (Armenakis et al., 1993; Jansen, 2000). In this respect, normative-reeducative change strategies are expected to be more effective than empirical-rational strategies in fostering individual readiness for organizational change.

Empirical evidence. Many empirical studies have demonstrated the effectiveness of normative-reeducative strategies in fostering individual readiness for change. In his classic work on changing food preference, Lewin (1948/1997c) demonstrated that participative discussion is more effective than a lecture. Similarly, Coch and French's (1948) study, which is often regarded as the first to investigate the causes of individuals' resistance to organizational change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999a), showed that people are more likely to accept and learn new methods if they participated in planning and developing the change. Following this tradition, many researchers have examined the relative effectiveness of participation in the change project or change decision making. For example, Zaltman and Duncan (1977), Falbe and Yukl (1992), and Nutt (1998) empirically showed that facilitative and reeducative strategies are more effective than strategies using persuasion, pressure, and edict.

Recent studies dealing with individuals' attitudes toward organizational change also support the effectiveness of normative-reeducative strategies in fostering individual readiness for organizational change. According to the studies, such factors as fairness of the change process (Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004; Fedor, Caldwell, & Herold, 2006), organizational justice (Bernerth, Armenakis, Feild, & Walker, 2007), involvement in decision making or in the change project (M. Brown & Cregan, 2008; Devos, Buelens, & Bouckenooghe, 2007; Devos, Vanderheyden, & Van den Broeck, 2001;

Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997; Wanberg & Banas, 2000; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000), and sharing information about the changes (M. Brown & Cregan, 2008; Miller, Johnson, & Grau, 1994; Wanberg & Banas, 2000) contribute to individuals' positive reactions to organizational change. Szabla's (2007) study is also notable in that it showed that normative-reeducative strategies are more effective than the other groups of strategies in eliciting positive cognitive, emotional, and intentional responses to organizational change. As the findings show, change implementation based on normative-reeducative strategies positively influence individuals' attitudes toward organizational change.

In sum, when it comes to fostering individuals' readiness for organizational change, normative-reeducative strategies are more effective than the other two types of strategies. Figure 2 summarizes how the core values or characteristics of normative-reeducative strategies can potentially foster each dimension of individual readiness for change.

In light of the discussion in this section, we propose the first proposition:

> *Proposition 1:* Individuals who experience normative-reeducative change strategies are more likely to have higher levels of readiness for organizational change than those who experience either empirical-rational strategies or power-coercive strategies.

Learning Culture and Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

Organizational change is not separate from an organization's history or from other circumstances from which the change emerges. Rather, it should be regarded as a continuous process that occurs in the historical, cultural, and political context of the organization (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991). Supporting this idea, researchers have examined the irrefutable roles of contextual factors such as culture, climate, and leadership in sustaining organizational change (e.g., Jones et al., 2005; A. D. Meyer, 1982a, 1982b; Schein, 2004; Schneider, Brief, & Guzzo, 1996). In particular, many organizational researchers have stressed the importance of a learning culture (Schein, 2004; Senge, 1990, 2000; Watkins & Marsick, 1993). For example, Schein (2004) argues that in a world of turbulent change organizations have to learn faster, which calls for a learning culture that favors "perpetual learning" (p. 394). Similarly, Watkins and Marsick (1993) pointed out that an organization needs a "culture that is learning oriented, with beliefs, values, and policies that support learning" (p. 166). Other researchers have also stressed the importance of cultures of inquiry and generativity in facilitating organizational learning and change (Argyris & Schön, 1996; Senge, 1990).

Influence of a Learning Culture on Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

The idea that change always involves learning (Beckhard & Pritchard, 1992; A. D. Meyer, 1982a) is one of the basic assumptions shared by HRD and OD researchers

Figure 2. Normative-reeducative change strategies and individual readiness for organizational change

(Swanson & Holton, 2001). More clearly, Watkins and Marsick (1993) explained the relationship between change and learning by defining change as "a cyclical process of creating knowledge (the change or innovation), disseminating it, implementing the change, and then institutionalizing what is learned by making it part of the organization's routines" (p. 21). Other organizational learning theorists have also argued that organizational learning is a prerequisite for successful organizational change (Baker & Sinkula, 1999; Garvin, 1993; Lundberg, 1995; Ulrich, Von Glinow, & Jick, 1993). By purposefully supporting individual learning, inquiry, and sharing and embedding

what is learned, a learning culture facilitates changes in organizational theories-in-use and in organizational memory—thereby facilitating organizational learning and change (Garvin, 1993; Huber, 1991; A. D. Meyer, 1982a; Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996).

The impact of culture on individuals has long been a topic of interest among researchers (Fuller & Clarke, 1994; Martin, 2002; A. D. Meyer, 1982a; Schein, 2004; Trice & Beyer, 1993). For example, Fuller and Clarke empirically showed that cultural norms and socialization experience do make a difference in individuals' achievement in the educational settings. Then, how does a learning culture influence individuals? As is widely acknowledged, individuals are embedded in organizational culture that is created by their actions yet, at the same time, the culture has an objective existence independent of the actions of any individual (Schein, 2004; Trice & Beyer, 1993). Each member of an organization constructs his or her own representation of the culture or of organizational theories-in-use (Argyris, Putnam, & Smith, 1985; A. D. Meyer, 1982b). According to Argyris and Schön (1996), through organizational inquiry individuals "modify their images of organization or their understandings of organizational phenomena and restructure their activities" (p. 16) and, therefore, change organizational theories-in-use. In other words, the alterations individuals make in their image of the organization during an organizational inquiry give rise to new organizational practices, which guide the socialization of individuals with particular theories-in-use (Argyris et al., 1985). In addition, the new practices create conditions where particular theories-in-use are effective, thereby reinforcing the theories-in-use. In this respect, as Argyris and Schön (1996) put it, organizational theories-in-use are "dependent on the ways in which its members represent it" (p. 16).

In an organization that embodies a learning culture, organizational routines and shared beliefs are regularly modified as a matter of institutionalized practice (Lundberg, 1995), and individuals are encouraged to undertake organizational inquiries in various ways (Preskill & Torres, 1999b; Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996). Therefore, in such an organization, individuals have more opportunities to be engaged in organizational inquiry as well as to capture and share what has been learned by others. Through these opportunities, individuals are encouraged to continuously modify their own image of the organization, to restructure their activities, to give rise to new practices, and, ultimately, to change organizational theories-in-use (Argyris & Schön, 1978, 1996). In this way, the learning culture enables individuals to be agents learning on behalf of their organization and to be ready for organizational change.

In addition, as reviewed above, organizations with a strong emphasis on a learning culture tend to be more apt to learn and change (Garvin, 1993; Huber, 1991; Watkins & Marsick, 1993, 1996). In this respect, a learning culture not only encourages individuals to be engaged in organizational learning but also enhances organizational capacity to make successful changes (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). Therefore, individuals in an organization with a strong emphasis on a learning culture may have learned that the organization is likely to thrive under changing organizational conditions, which will

also result in a higher level of individual readiness for organizational change. The discussions in this section lead to a second proposition.

> *Proposition 2:* Individuals who perceive their work environment to have characteristics associated with a learning culture are more likely to have higher levels of readiness for organizational change.

Combined Influence of Normative-Reeducative Change Strategies and a Learning Culture on Individual Readiness for Organizational Change

In the above arguments, we have proposed two key propositions related to conditions that affect readiness for change. As addressed in the discussion to draw Proposition 1, whether change is best developed with the active involvement of organizational members or under the direction of top leaders is one of the most debated issues in the field of organizational change. Whether a researcher takes strategic management approaches or OD approaches, he or she may agree that "participation by knowledgeable, skilled, and motivated members of the organization does enhance a change project; participation by uninformed, unskilled, and unmotivated members of the workforce does not" (Dunphy, 2000, p. 133). One cannot assume that simply involving people will produce positive benefits (Locke, Schweiger, & Latham, 1986; Pasmore & Fagans, 1992). Rather, in order for organizational members' involvement and participation in the change process to have successful outcomes, they must be knowledgeable, capable, and motivated to make a genuine contribution. In this respect, normative-reeducative strategies (Chin & Benne, 1985) can be most effective and further justified when organizations have created the conditions in which organizational members can participate competently (Argyris, 1973) and when they have the capability to contribute to change implementation (Skelley, 1989).

Under what circumstances, then, are organizational members more likely to be capable of contributing to the success of a change initiative? As posited through Proposition 2, a learning culture develops the capability of individuals to identify and solve work-related problems by supporting organizational learning—more specifically, by creating continuous learning opportunities, encouraging collaboration and team learning, creating systems to capture and share learning, and empowering people (Watkins & Marsick, 1993). In this respect, it can be argued that individuals who work in an environment that embodies a learning culture are more likely to be capable of making genuine contributions to change than those who have not. Based on the discussion thus far, we propose the third proposition.

> *Proposition 3:* A learning culture moderates the relationship between normative-reeducative strategies and readiness for change—specifically, the relationship between normative-reeducative strategies and readiness for change is more positive in situations where the learning culture is stronger.

Implications for HROD Research and Practice

The question of how to foster readiness for change introduces a different perspective on the situation and produces different outcomes from the question of how to overcome resistance to change. The former creates a more dynamic, proactive, and systemic view of change than the latter. In addition, while a focus on resistance assumes that change agent's role is that of monitoring who reacts to signs of resistance and overcoming it, the construct of readiness enables change agents to take on the role of coaches and champions for change (Dent & Goldberg, 1999a; Ford et al., 2008; Jansen, 2000). By proposing the use of the concept of individual readiness for organizational change instead of that of resistance to change, this conceptual article suggests alternative perspectives for HROD researchers and practitioners to examine individuals' attitudes toward organizational change.

In addition, this article discusses the conditions the literature has most emphasized as conducive to fostering individual readiness for organizational change. In examining the conditions, we focused on the following two key features as the conditions that are expected to foster individual readiness for organizational change: (a) OD approaches to change implementation that are based on the normative-reeducative change strategy (Chin & Benne, 1985) and (b) an ongoing organizational effort to enhance organizational health and capability through fostering the learning culture (Watkins & Golembiewski, 1995). Specifically, based on the literature, we proposed that individuals who experience normative-reeducative change strategies are more likely to exhibit higher levels of readiness for change (Proposition 1) and that individuals who perceive their work environment as having characteristics aligned with the learning culture are more likely to have higher levels of readiness for change (Propositions 2). Furthermore, we also argued that the relationship between normative-reeducative strategies and readiness for change would be more positive in situations where the learning culture is stronger (Proposition 3).

Each proposition has significant implications for HROD research and practices. First of all, as we discussed above, organizational change requires individuals to reconsider their beliefs, values, and normative orientations (Ford et al., 2008; Gioia et al., 1994; Preskill & Torres, 1999b). As Proposition 1 suggests, when designing organizational change interventions, organization change professionals should not only consider changes in knowledge and information or intellectual rationales for change but also focus on changes in attitudes, values, and significant relationships (Szabla, 2007). With its focus on involvement and participation, the normative-reeducative approach (on which OD is based) allows the opportunity for individuals to examine their attitudes, values, and normative orientations. Of course, providing meaningful opportunities for involvement and participation does not necessarily mean that all organizational members will be enthusiastic about the change (Freedman, 2006). Nor does it mean that the suppression of conflict is desired (Anderson, 2009). Rather, it seeks to bring conflicts to light where they can be addressed in a healthy manner. Under normative-reeducative strategies, individuals are given an opportunity to express an opinion—to

express any legitimate reasons for resistance and to allow those to be utilized to improve the change implementation. In this way, too, normative-reeducative approaches help organization change professionals overcome prochange biases or the presumption that changes will eventually benefit organizations, which are prevalent in the organizational change literature (Abrahamson, 1991; Kimberly, 1981; Rogers, 2003).

Second, when implementing change initiatives with the leaders and agents of an organization, change professionals should emphasize the fact that organizational change should be regarded as a continuous process that occurs in a given organizational context (Pettigrew & Whipp, 1991). As discussed above, a learning culture encourages individuals to be engaged in organizational learning and enhances organizational capacity to make successful changes. Therefore, individuals in an environment that strongly emphasizes a learning culture are more likely to be ready for organizational change than those who have not (Proposition 2). Furthermore, a learning culture enhances individual capabilities to effectively participate in and make genuine contributions to change process (Proposition 3). In this regard, organizations should foster a learning culture to better cope with organizational change.

Finally, in this article we forwarded three propositions that require future research. By suggesting these propositions, we have initiated the "recurring cycle" (Lynham, 2000, p. 161) of theory building, and now each of these must be tested, verified, and refined to contribute to the theory-base. We have begun this research, but other researchers are certainly encouraged to increase their focus on readiness for change and the conditions that foster it so that we might together shift the literature and practitioners' focus more toward this valuable construct and be better positioned to facilitate organizational change in the future.

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