

WHO'S READY FOR WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE?

WHOLE FIELD ASSESSMENT AND THE CHANGE READINESS CHECKLIST¹

By Sherene Zolno

The success of any major organizational change effort is dependent to a large extent on the "readiness" level of the employees. "Readiness" is defined as the degree to which employees are predisposed to support, ignore or resist change. This Change Readiness Checklist will help you determine employee "readiness" for change by analyzing your perceptions of them.

This checklist draws from the theory of social construction, an approach to organizational change based on the belief that **intentional collective action** allows for a new and compelling vision of the organization to evolve.

This belief is often linked to the research showing that social beings evolve towards images that are affirming, i.e. that employees are ready to support change when clear about their strengths and positively acknowledged for their contributions. It is believed that employees would then feel confident that they can make the change occur – they'll know how to repeat their success, even with a new context.

When an organization's vision is grounded in real experience and history, it's possible to collaboratively create a knowledge link between past, present, *and* future capacities...and this brings readiness for change.

The Field Alignment™ model, published in the *2008 Annual*, (see next page) introduced the author's idea that a whole system change intervention – one that effects sustainable change in a complex organization – must be designed to intervene in the three key aspects of a system: it's style, strategy and structure (the 'whole field'). An integrated approach that impacts the whole field increases the potential for achieving change goals by generating a critical mass for change.¹

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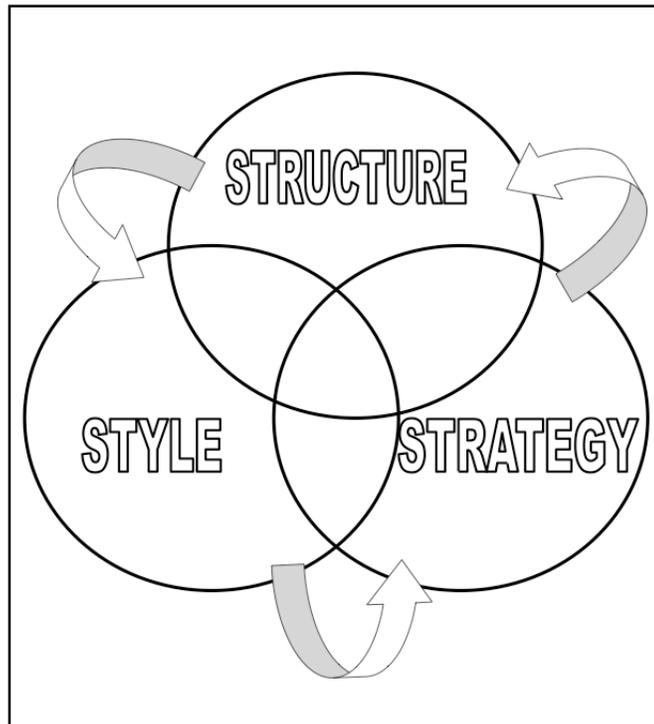
An important aspect of this whole system intervention is ensuring the readiness level for change of the organization's employees.

As a change agent or change leader, you can better gauge the readiness of employees for change, and increase the potential for sustainable, system-wide change, by using the author's Change Readiness Checklist. This Checklist, the design of which is based on an *appreciative approach*ⁱⁱ, initiates an inquiry about employee strengths and capabilities as its measure of readiness, and, as a result, is likely to bring about the added benefit of an *increase* in readiness for change.

INTRODUCTION

Consulting to or leading an organization going through major change requires bringing a whole system perspective, coupled with an *appreciative eye*, to the design of the intervention. Taking a whole system perspective means creating an integrated intervention plan that is designed to foster change in multiple parts of the organization at the same time. Such a comprehensive intervention can bring about a profound shift in the organization's identity, view of its future and way of doing business.

This approach to intervention design is more likely to support the organization in reaching its 'tipping point' – the point of critical mass – that moves the organization towards its desired new configuration (a "whole field" change).



The positive inquiry that makes change possible.

The success of any major change effort is dependent to a large extent on the readiness level of the organization's employees. "Readiness" is here defined as the degree to which employees are predisposed to support change, as opposed to ignoring or resisting it.

Recent research, particularly in the arena of social construction and system change, suggests that organizational change occurs as part of **intentional collective action**ⁱⁱⁱ. Therefore, bringing about complex change in an organization

is most likely to occur when people within that system are fully engaged in a cooperative process creating it.

Support for change comes about “by connecting people to the organization’s strategy, capturing their imaginations, respecting their contributions, and energizing the change process”^{iv} Bringing this positive view of the key role employees play in effecting complex change, having the *appreciative eye* spoken of earlier, increases employee readiness to support change.

I’ve found it to be especially powerful when employees are clear about their strengths and positively acknowledged for their successes of the past. The sense of capability that results leads to confidence in making a change— after all, employees are repeating their successes of the past, just within a new context. Thus a knowledge link between past, present, *and* future capacities is forged . . . and this brings readiness for change.

The Change Readiness Checklist that follows will help you determine employee "readiness" for change as well as identify conversations you need to have with employees to help them get ready to participate in and support change.

Directions: You can compute the overall average, however a more useful process would be to highlight areas that have low scores and begin planning for how to increase those scores.

Change Readiness Checklist

1. Employees feel valued and hopeful about the future of their organization.

It is important to honor the contributions of employees to pass successes; building a platform for the future based on strengths.

0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
Don't feel valued, Feel valued
Feel hopeless Feel hopeful

2. Employees are involved in the planning.

It is human nature for people to support what they helped create, so employees need to have a key role in co-creating the change.

0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
Employees Employees
not involved are involved

3. The purpose of the change is clear.

Employees need a full understanding of why the sponsors are implementing the change, or anxiety and suspicion may fill the information vacuum.

0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
Purpose is Purpose is
unclear clear

4. Employees believe there is a need for the change.

Even if the employees fully understand the *rationale* for the change, they may not agree that a change is needed.

0 _____ 1 _____ 2 _____ 3 _____ 4 _____ 5 _____
No need Need
for change for change

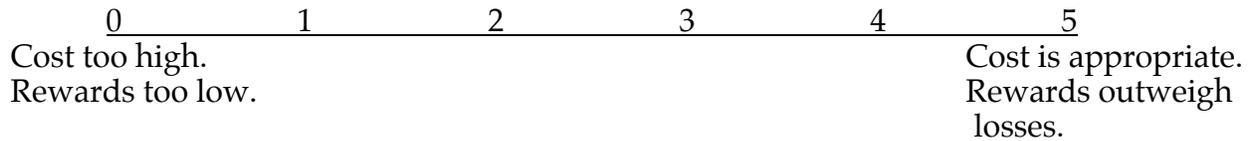
5. There is good communication regarding the change.

Even if the change affects only a few people, communication can be easily distorted.



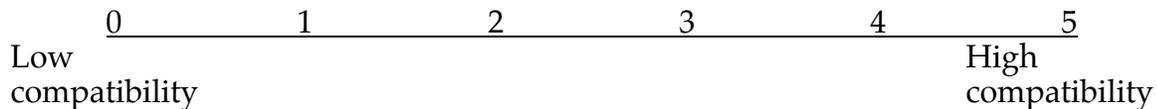
6. The "cost" is not too high, and the rewards are greater than the losses.

For employees to be motivated toward the change, a reward for accomplishment must be provided in the form of something they truly value, and it must compensate for any physical, intellectual or emotional price they perceive they will pay.

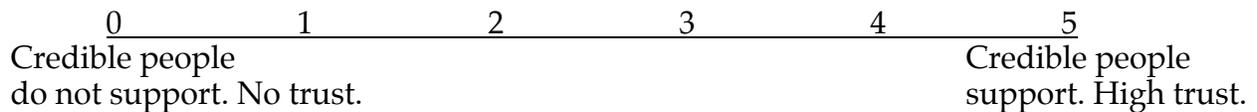


7. The compatibility of the change is perceived to be high.

Compatibility relates to how closely employees view the change aligning with existing organizational values or with their own personal beliefs and values, especially any that employees hold as fundamental or "sacred".



8. Credible people in the organization are advocating the change, and genuinely supporting it, and there is respect for and trust in the change sponsor or change agent.



References

- ⁱ Zolno, S. (2008), "Getting Smart About System Change: Developing Whole System IQ," in *The 2008 Annual: Developing Human Resources*, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco.
- ⁱⁱ Zolno, S. (2002), "Appreciative Inquiry: new thinking at work," in *The 2002 Annual: Developing Human Resources*, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco.
- ⁱⁱⁱ See, for example: Fuller, C. S., Griffin, T. J., & Ludema, J. D. (2000). Appreciative future search: Involving the whole system in positive organization change. *Organization Development Journal*, 18, 2, 29-41; Gergen, K. J. 1994. *Realities and relationships: Soundings in social construction*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press; and Weisbord, M. R. 1987. *Productive workplaces: Organizing and managing for dignity, meaning, and community*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- ^{iv} Zolno, S. (2002), "Appreciative Inquiry: new thinking at work," in *The 2002 Annual: Developing Human Resources*, Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer, San Francisco.

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