WHO’S READY FOR WHOLE SYSTEM CHANGE?

WHOLE FIELD ASSESSMENT AND THE CHANGE READINESS CHECKLIST

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.

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*[^1], 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*[^2]. 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.” 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 not involved Employees 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 unclear Purpose is 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 for change Need for change
5. **There is good communication regarding the change.**

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

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication is not good</td>
<td>Communication is good</td>
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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.

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<td>Cost too high.</td>
<td>Cost is appropriate.</td>
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<td>Rewards too low.</td>
<td>Rewards outweigh losses.</td>
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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”.

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<td>Low compatibility</td>
<td>High compatibility</td>
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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.**

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<td>Credible people do not support. No trust.</td>
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9. Employees believe there will be adequate organizational support for the change.

If the change requires organizational resources (money, time commitments by certain managers, new equipment/facilities, specialized training, etc.), employees may not see the value of changing. Also, operating budgets can be overburdened with the cost of planning, purchasing and implementing the organizational change.

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<td>Resources</td>
<td>Resources</td>
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10. Key job characteristics that are being changed will have a positive impact on the employee.

Employees will be more accepting of the change if they perceive that it will increase their autonomy and the value the organization places on their job. Resistance is increased if employees believe the change will block or significantly restrict the achievement of their own personal ambitions, negatively impact their social relations, or involve a significant challenge that is likely to go un-rewarded.

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<td>Negative impact</td>
<td>Positive impact</td>
<td>on job characteristics</td>
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11. Employees have been through well-executed changes in the past, and are confident in their capacity to implement the change.

Change involves learning and learning usually involves mistakes. When people are not given the freedom to make mistakes while learning, they become afraid and easily discouraged. Employees must perceive that they already possess the skills and knowledge required for implementing the change, or that the necessary training will be provided by the organization.

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<td>Not confident</td>
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References


Shereen Zolno, RODC, executive director of The Leading Clinic, is a researcher, educator, executive coach and consultant whose expertise includes working with leadership teams to ready them for the future, and assisting organizations in identifying strategic intentions, improving operations and transforming culture. Her research-based New Century Leadership™ program and Timeline for Tomorrow process are the foundation for whole system change in several major organizations.

Ms. Zolno served on ASTD’s OD Professional Practice Area board. Her writing has been published in ASTD’s Research Monograph and OD Network’s OD Practitioner and VisionAction Journals, in Jossey-Bass/Pfeiffer’s 2000 and 2002 Annuals, as well as in numerous other professional publications.

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