Author's response to reviews

Title: A theory of organizational readiness for change

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Author's response to reviews: see over

REVIEW 1

1. While this paper provides an important position statement, it doesn't fully review the literature on change focused on implementing innovation. Almost all the literature referred to in this paper is based on work in the United States, but there is a significant literature on change processes in organizations in the United Kingdom, and more scattered literature from other countries. While I don't consider that this has to be addressed, I think that Dr. Weiner should at least consider this omitted literature, and consider whether there is merit in at least referring to it, if only to say that it's outside the scope of his review. I think that some of this literature provides some counter-point to the assertions he makes in this paper. On the other hand, I would expect some of the authors of this literature, especially those in the UK, to respond to this paper, which would facilitate the debate that this paper can stimulate. As a result, I don't think it's essential that he take this on.

   I responded to this comment by inserting some discussion about receptive organizational context— a construct that several UK researchers have developed in their research on the National Health Service (see page 7). Trish Greenhalgh's systematic review identifies this construct (and cites the work of these researchers) as an important element of the inner context influencing the adoption, implementation, and sustainability of innovations in health service organizations. In the revised manuscript, I try to show how this construct relates to organizational readiness for change as I have defined it. I recognize that this discussion hardly covers the waterfront of the literature on change process emanating from the UK. I hope, however, that this addition not only responds to your request but also enhances the quality of the manuscript.

2. The diagram provided in the figure is very helpful, but I'm not sure the text tracks it as closely as I think it might. I think it may be helpful to use headers within the text that correspond to the items in the diagram-- particularly those in the second column boxes, which are the focus of this paper. I think that this may help organize the paper a little more clearly.

   I have added sub-headers in the section titled, "What Conditions Promote Organizational Readiness for Change?" These sub-headers map directly to the construct labels in the figure. Thank you for this suggestion. It does make it easier for the reader to see the connection between the text and the figure.

3. While I fully appreciate that the focus of this paper is supra-individual-- and I fully endorse that-- the lack of discussion about some of the dominant individual level theories of behavior change make this paper a little less relevant than I think it could be. I think some discussion of the Theory of Planned Behavior, and how this theory (or others if Dr. Weiner feels there is strong evidence to support other individual level theories of behavior change) could inform or be juxtaposed against the theory of organizational readiness to change that he posits, and would be interesting. Again, however, I think it's likely that this paper will stimulate others to do this reflection and juxtaposition, so it is not necessary that he take this on.

In response to this comment, I added more discussion in the Summary section (see pages 16-17). Specifically, I revised the first paragraph of the section to clarify that organization-level theories of readiness are best suited for situations involving collective, coordinated behavior change. I note that individual-level theories of behavior change—such as the Theory of Planned Behavior or the Transtheoretical Model of Change—can be usefully applied to circumstances where low levels of interdependence exist in adoption decisions, implementation processes, actual use of an innovation or practice, and the realization of anticipated benefits from an innovation or practice. As I point out, there are many evidence-based practices that meet these criteria. In these instances, there is little to gain by using an organization-level theory. Where organization-level theories gain the most traction is when collective, coordinated action is necessary because interdependence exists (task, outcome, or both). In such circumstances, individuals are enmeshed in a web of interconnection. What matters is not just what I can do on my own, or even what we can do individually. Rather, what matters is what we can do together. Bandura expressed this idea when he said that collective efficacy is not simply the aggregate of individuals' self-efficacy. Collective efficacy is conjoint efficacy (confidence in what we can do together). As I note the revised discussion section, there are plenty of cases where interdependence is not a significant concern. Hence, there are plenty of cases where individual-level theories of behavior change work just fine…in fact, better than organizational ones.

REVIEW 2

1. This reviewer finds several significant problems with the proposed theory as described. Perhaps most importantly this paper does not spell out where this theory will lead us, what advances for the field, either in a scientific or practical way that may result from this theory. For example, given the constructs and relationships described in the theory, what does this tell an organization that needs assistance in implementing a new and complex technology? The author concludes that the keys to increasing readiness are raising change valence and promoting a positive assessment of task demands, resource availability and situational factors. But change valence is a key component defining readiness to change according to the theory; thus raising readiness to change by raising a major component of its definition amounts to a tautology. The author also argues that increasing readiness can be accomplished by promoting a positive assessment of task demands, resource availability and situational factors, which the theory states are key determinants of change efficacy. Yet it seems unlikely that simply promoting a positive assessment of these factors will increase readiness without directly addressing the issues that cause them to be limiting factors in the first place. For example, what aspects of task demands are limiting factors and how might tasks be redefined in order to better prepare for change? If resources are a barrier to change, what additional resources are needed in order to prepare for change? The theory provides no guidance on how to identify the limiting factors or how to fix them. In fact, the author concludes that readiness-enhancing strategies are equifinal, that is, many different strategies may lead to equally positive results. However, the theory does not provide guidance on how to select a strategy based on the constructs in the theory, only that they should be tailored to local needs, opportunities and constraints. Thus every situation is different and there is little guidance on how to proceed.

In response to the reviewer's comment, I revised the Summary section to highlight three contributions the article makes to theory and research (see pages 17-20). First, the article's discussion of the meaning of organizational readiness addresses a fundamental conceptual ambiguity that runs through the literature on the topic: is readiness a structural construct or a psychological one? The article seeks to reconcile the structural view and psychological view by specifying a relationship between them (see also Critique #3 below). Second, the article's discussion of determinants illuminates the theoretical basis for the various strategies that change management experts recommend for creating organizational readiness. Identifying the mechanisms or pathways through which these strategies have affect organizational readiness could—depending on the results of empirical studies—strengthen the scientific basis for experts' recommendations. Third, the article's discussion of outcomes establishes a theoretical link between two bodies of research that have had little scholarly interchange: organizational readiness for change and implementation theory and research. As I suggest in the revised Summary section, much could be gained by connecting these two literatures.

I hope that these revisions have clarified the ways in which this article contributes to theory and research. Admittedly, an organization in need of assistance in implementing a new and complex technology might not find much value in this article. However, this article was not intended as a practical guide for creating readiness. Rather, this article sought to develop a theory of organizational readiness that would promote scholarly discussion and stimulate empirical inquiry. It is on this basis that the value of this effort should be judged.

The theory that I describe treats change valence as a determinant of readiness, not a component of readiness. Hence, no tautology exists. Change valence refers to the degree to which organizational members value a specific, impending change—that is, the extent to which they feel the specific, impending change is needed, important, or worthwhile. Although change valence is predictive of change commitment, it is not synonymous with it. Change valence concerns organizational members' beliefs, attitudes, and expectations about a specific impending change. Change commitment concerns organizational members resolve (motivation) to engage in the courses of action necessary to implement the change. Many theories distinguish between beliefs, attitudes, or expectations on the one hand and intentions, motivation, or commitment on the other. The theory I propose makes the same distinction. Although the former predict the latter, they are not the same conceptually, nor are they perfectly correlated empirically.

It is possible that my discussion of Herscovitch and Meyer's research on commitment clouded the distinction between change valence and change commitment. These authors suggest that different motives (reasons) produce different *types* of commitment. I do not share this view. As I see it, different motives produce different *levels* of commitment, not different *types* of commitment. I therefore revised the text on pages 6 and 12 to resolve any ambiguity that my discussion of their research might have raised about the distinction between change valence and commitment.

In revising the Summary section, I have tried to make clearer that theory does not undermine the value of the practical strategies that change experts recommend for increasing organizational readiness for change. Highlighting the discrepancy between current and desired performance levels, fomenting dissatisfaction with the status quo, creating an appealing vision of a future state of affairs all seem like perfectly reasonable strategies for increasing the perceived value of the change in organizational members eyes and thereby raising organizational readiness. So too do the reviewer's suggested strategies. Identifying the task demands that seem like limiting factors, increasing the availability of resources to match task demands, and (as suggested in Critique #2) making sure that those responsible for implementing the change know what the task demands are and what resources are available also sound like perfectly reasonable strategies. They are not only reasonable, they are consistent with the theory that I proposed. These strategies would increase the likelihood that those responsible for implementing the change see a good fit between task demands, available resources, and situational factors affecting implementation. The better the perceived fit, the more confident they will feel that together they can implement the change successfully. Again, the aim of the article was to advance theory. Consistent with that aim, the article does not suggest practical strategies for increasing readiness, but rather explains theoretically how and why the strategies proposed by others might work.

Finally, I revised the Summary section to clarify that the question of whether the strategies that experts recommend for increasing organization readiness are equifinal is ultimately an empirical one (see page 19). My intention in raising the equifinality argument was simply to cast some healthy skepticism on the "one best way" prescriptions found in much of the practitioner-oriented change management literature.

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

It is important to recognize that the paper focuses on theory, not measurement. Hence, the paper's discussion of measurement issues is, by necessity, brief.

However, I revised the discussion of measurement issues to respond to the reviewer's comments, as others might share his concerns (see pages 14-16).

Specifically, I briefly mention the reasons why so many publicly available instruments exhibit limited evidence of reliability or validity and why those instruments that have undergone systematic psychometric assessment are not suitable for measuring organizational readiness for change as I have defined the construct. This is brief account of a much more extensive assessment and discussion found in two comprehensive reviews of the literature on organizational readiness for change (cited in the manuscript). I hope that this account provides enough detail that readers can follow the argument in this paper without having to look up the literature reviews.

In addition, I suggested in the first bullet a few strategies for focusing respondents' attention on a specific impending organizational change.

Finally, I responded to the reviewer's comment about the challenge of developing specific yet reliable and valid measures by noting that self-efficacy researchers have faced a similar challenge and overcome it. I agree with the reviewer that developing instruments that fit this theory of readiness would be challenging. However, based on the experience of self-efficacy researchers, I am optimistic about the possibilities of developing context-specific organizational readiness for change instruments that are reliable and valid within specific domains of application. How large or small those domains might be (i.e., how many different instruments would we need) is an empirical question worthy of investigation.

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

Rather than dismiss the structural view of readiness, the theory I propose seeks to <u>reconcile</u> the structural view of readiness and the psychological view of readiness by specifying a relationship between the two. The theory treats the structural attributes and resource endowments of organizations as important determinants of readiness, but not readiness itself. As I see it, readiness is in the eye of the beholder; and the "eyes" that matter most are those of the people who must work together to implement the change.

As the theory suggests, structural attributes and resource endowments <u>do</u> matter. Organizational members charged with implementing or supporting the change effort make a judgment about their collective readiness by appraising the match between task demands and available resources. They also consider whether the

organization can mobilize (or acquire) resources and coordinate people's activities in ways that lead to successful implementation. If they perceive that critical resources are lacking or they perceive that organizational structures and routines will inhibit resource deployment and coordinated action, they are likely judge organizational readiness as low. Absent some intervention, they are likely to put forth less effort, give up more easily in the face of obstacles, and exhibit less pro-social change-related behavior (e.g., going the extra mile).

I agree with the reviewer that, all too often, many organizational members do not have the information they need about task demands or resource availability to make informed (i.e., accurate) readiness assessments. They might think, for example, that the organization does not have the resources necessary to implement the change successfully, when in fact the organization does have the resources. What happens in these situations? Organizational members "go with what they know." That this, they perceive that organizational readiness is low (i.e., "We don't have what it takes to implement this successfully") and they adjust their expectations, motivations, and effort accordingly.

In this case, as in many cases, perception governs behavior. Perception might be based on incomplete or even erroneous information, but it governs behavior nonetheless. Organizational members might lack the information they need to judge their capabilities to implement a change, or they might overestimate their capabilities, or they might underestimate their capabilities. Regardless, they will act on their judgments of their capabilities, no matter how accurate they are or how much they align with the "objective" assessments of managers, consultants, or researchers.

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

I have revised the manuscript to clarify that organizational features such as culture, climate, structures, policies, routines, and resources can create a receptive context for organizational change (see page 7). However, receptive context does not translate directly into organizational readiness. The *content* of change matters as much as the *context* of change. Even when organizational members work in a very receptive organizational context, they do not value all proposed or impending organizational changes equally. A multispecialty physician practice might exhibit an organizational culture that values risk-taking and experimentation. It might also exhibit a positive organizational climate (e.g., good working relationships). Yet, despite this receptive context, the organizational members might greatly value electronic medical records, yet see little or no value in open access scheduling. Even though, in general, they value innovation, experimentation, risk-taking, and flexibility, they still exhibit different levels of change valence (and hence change commitment) to different types of organizational change. Change commitment is not solely a function of general organizational features (i.e., context). Change content also matters.

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The same argument can be made for change efficacy. Organizational members formulate their change efficacy judgments based on a mixture of general organizational resources and capabilities and change-specific resources and capabilities. In appraising the match between task demands and available resources, for example, organizational members consider not only the overall financial health of the organization (i.e., whether slack resources exist), but also the budget for the specific change effort seems adequate. Moreover, in appraising whether the organization can skillfully deploy these financial resources in support of the change, they consider not only the general organizational climate (e.g., morale), but also the vested interests of resource holders and the political savvy of the specific managers or clinicians leading this specific change effort.

In response to the reviewer's last comment, I have revised the manuscript to include the idea that a receptive organizational context might be a necessary condition for readiness, even if it is not a sufficient one (see page 7). To illustrate this point, I note that good managerial-clinical relationships might be necessary for promoting any change at all even if it does not guarantee that clinicians will commit to implementing a specific change. I also note that the theory that I propose embraces this possibility by regarding organizational features that create receptive contexts as determinants of readiness rather than readiness itself. In this way, the factors that create organizational readiness as a general state of affairs are recognized in the theory.

Thank you for these comments. I believe the revisions that they prompted have improved the clarity and quality of theory presented in the article.